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Boston University

Graduate School

Thesis

Hebbel's Portraiture of Women

Submitted by

Rosa Rabinow

(A.B., Boston University, 1927)

In partial fulfilment of requirements for  
the degree of Master of Arts

1928

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Hebbel's Portraiture of Women

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## Hebbel's Portraiture of Women

## Introduction

On the eighteenth of March in 1813 a boy was born at Wesselburnen in Norderdithmarichen in the home of a mason who, if the fates had not intervened, would, in the natural course of events, also have become a mason. But his own indomitable determination to develop that power which he knew was his drove Christian Friedrich Hebbel out of those surroundings in which he was born, through years of struggle, sorrow, and actual physical want, to the heights of artistic achievement.

As has been true of practically every writer of ability, his work found enthusiastic friends and equally enthusiastic enemies. To be sure, as he himself clearly realized, he is not of that small group of the greatest; yet by this time there can be no question of the permanent place in German literature of the man whom Heine hailed as the leader of a new artistic period.<sup>1</sup> Standing at the beginning of modern German drama, his work introduced a new dramatic epoch and presented to the world one of the greatest German dramatists since the days of the classic writers. "Als eine einsame, grosse auf sich selbst mit starrer Festigkeit ruhende Persönlichkeit ragt Hebbel in der Literatur des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts

1. Hebbel, Christian Friedrich. "Briefe." Siebenter Band. Page 151, line 11.



auf: die kommenden Jahrhunderte werden ihn vielleicht als  
den Grundstein einer neuen Entwicklung der Kunst rühmen."<sup>1.</sup>

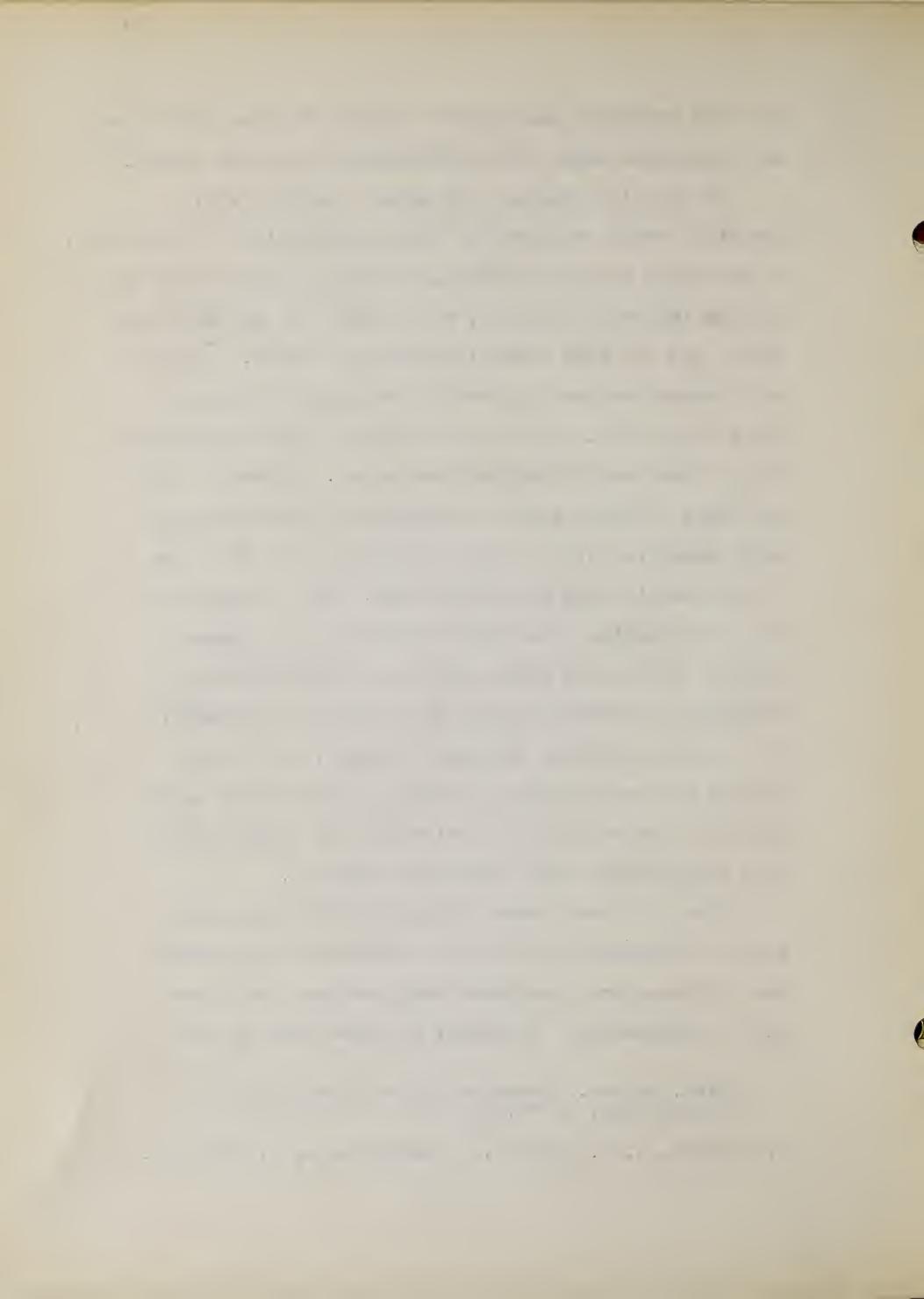
Of all his dramatic work seven tragedies will probably remain as Hebbel's chief contribution to literature.

In all these he has consciously sought, as one of his minor thoughts important purposes, to do honor to "die weibliche Natur, die ich hoch über die männliche stelle."<sup>2.</sup> And in this attempt he has succeeded as only few men have in world literature, for he is one of that small number who truly understood and appreciated women. Indeed, in his portrayal of ideal women of surpassing intelligence and moral power he paid his debt of gratitude to those devoted women to whom he owed so much. Yet, in spite of this idealization, his point of view is by no means limited, for he has given us not only the spiritual strength of Genoveva and the moral power of Mariamne, but also the yielding weakness of Klara. Not often has any one man succeeded in giving to the world such a gallery of magnificent portraits as this rough-hewn son of a Schleswig-Holstein mason has produced.

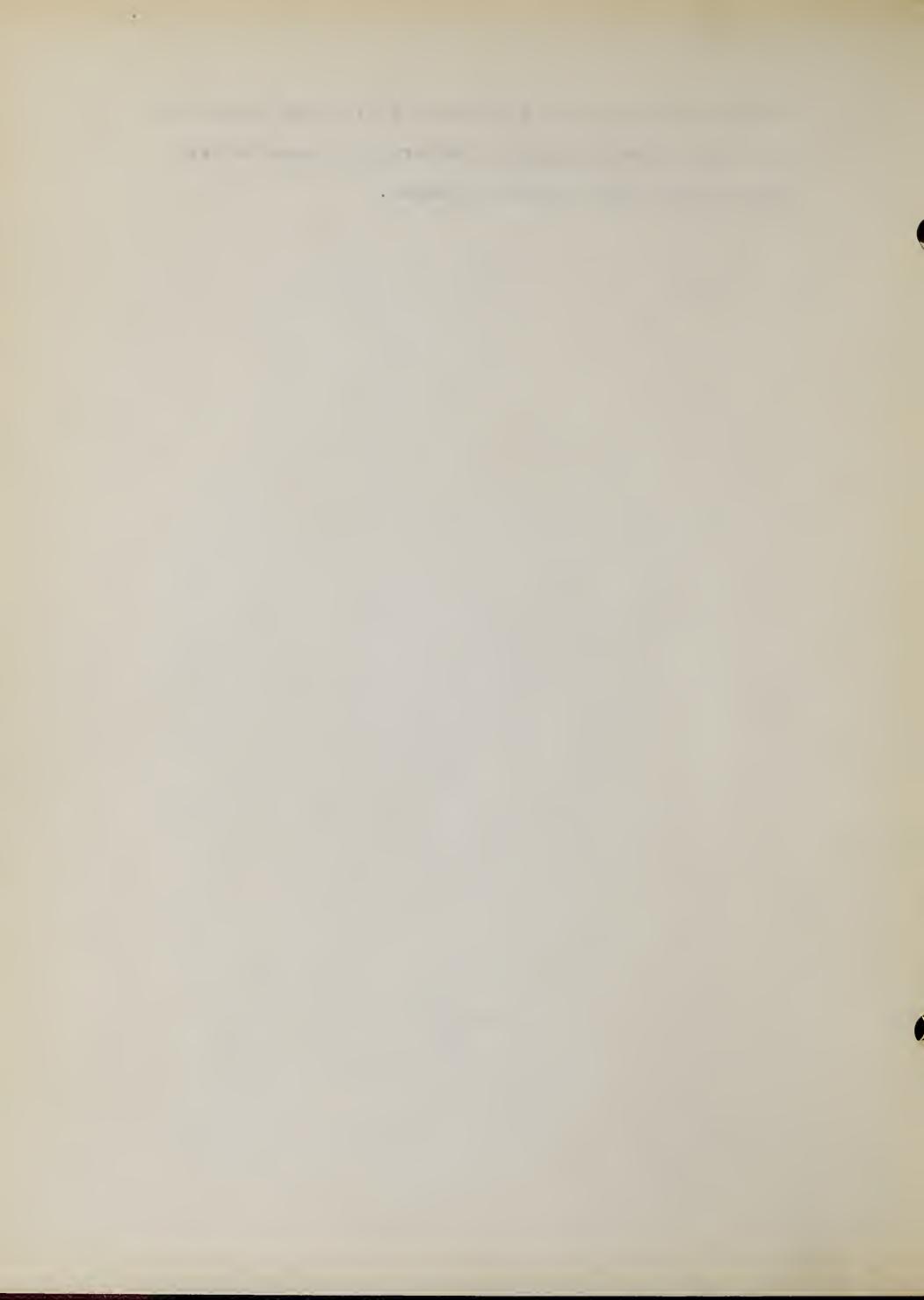
Thus, in these seven tragedies he has presented eight incomparable women of such majesty and strength, such delicacy and loveliness that one must bow before them in admiration. If Hebbel had done nothing else

1. Biese, Alfred. Deutsche Literaturgeschichte." Dritter Band, p. 71. f. 10.

2. Hebbel, C. F. "Briefe." Zweiter Band, p. 127, l. 7.



worthy of mention, his work would still live because of his deep understanding and masterly portrayal of all that is grand and lovable in woman.



### Hebbel's Conception of Womanhood

In agreement with his basic conception of a dualism throughout the universe, Hebbel sees also a dualism of sex, with man and woman as the opposing forces, always trying to meet through their love and yet never quite succeeding in reaching the fullest possible completeness of that love. Of these two forces the feminine is always on a higher plane. The man, noble as he may be, can never quite scale the spiritual heights upon which the woman stands; this failure is expressed by the inability of the man ever fully to understand the woman:

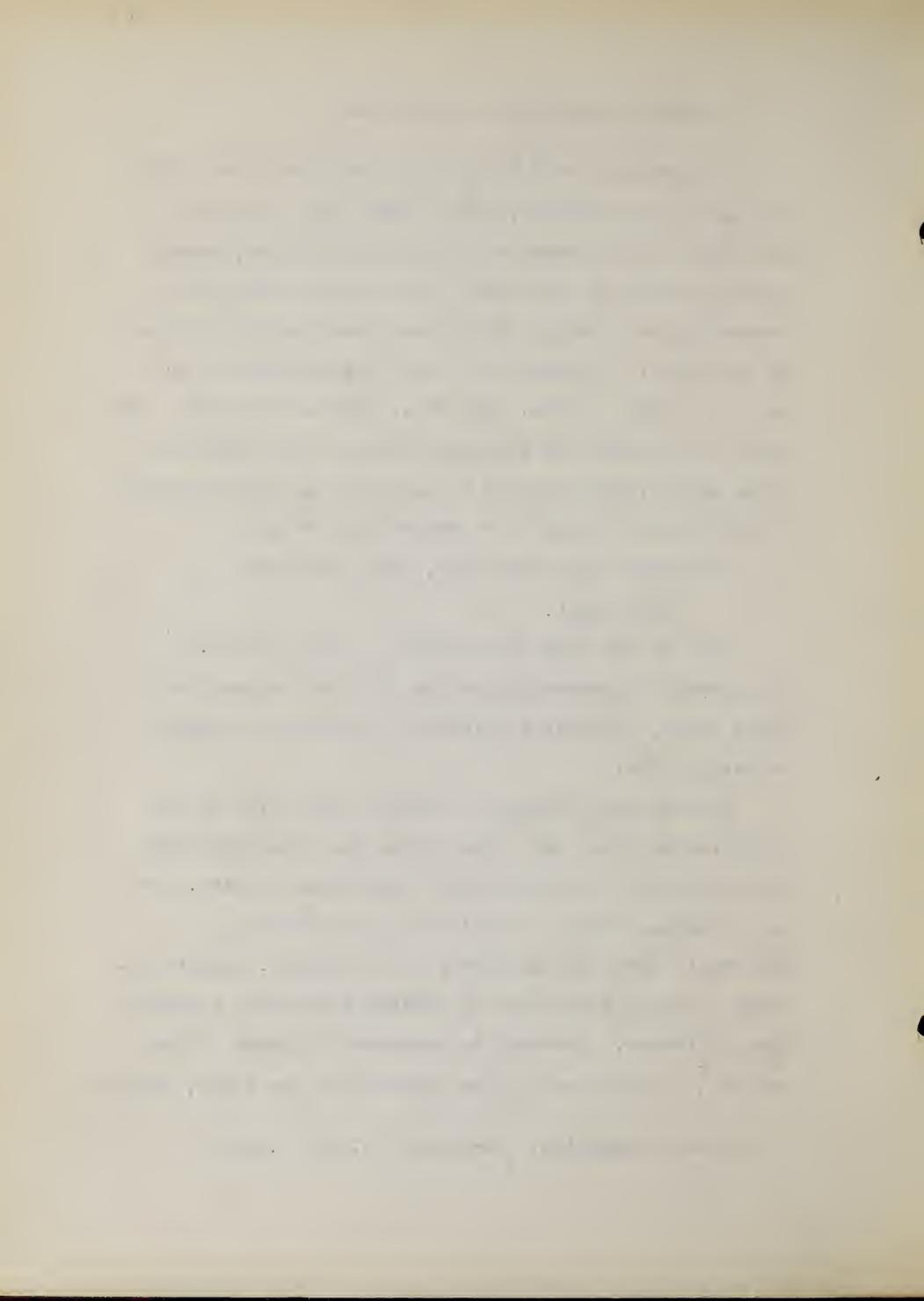
„Dies fehlt dem Mann noch, wenn ihm Nichts  
mehr fehlt,

Dass er das Weib nicht kennt, so wie sie ist."<sup>1.</sup>

Thus Hebbel expresses his own worship and respect for those women, especially Elise and Christine, who meant so much to him.

Through this failure of the man ever fully to appreciate the woman who loves him we see under different circumstances in each case the tragic side of love. Because Herodes fails to realize the true depth of Meriamne's love, he destroys her and himself. Judith becomes only the instrument of momentary physical enjoyment for Holofernes. Genoveva is condemned to death by that man who, in spite of all the evidence in the world, should

1. Hebbel, Friedrich. "Genoveva," p. 93, l.154.



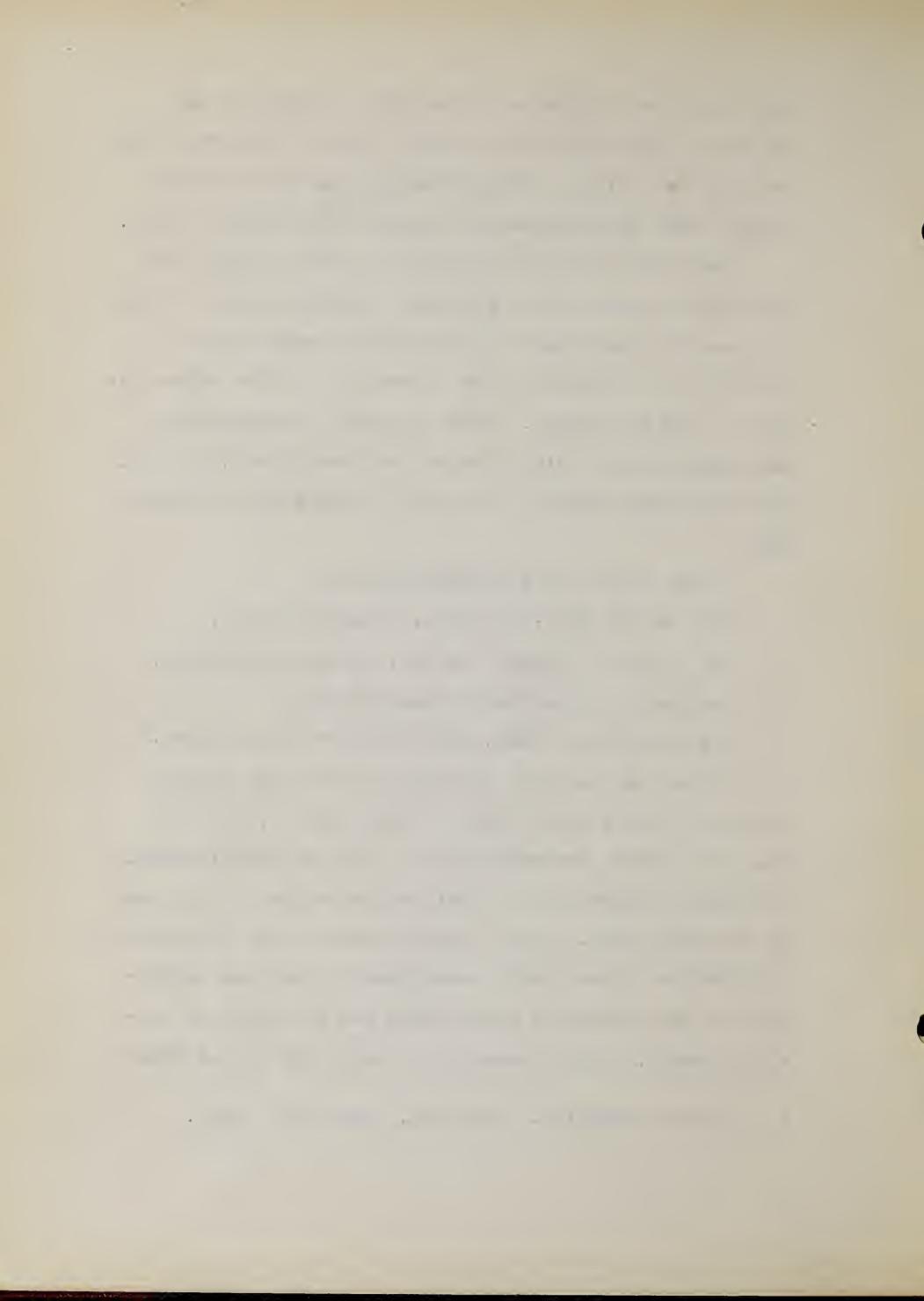
have known her incapable of the deed of which she was accused. Only Agnes and Kriemhild escape the common fate, and even Kriemhild is wronged through the man she loves by those who should have been nearest and dearest to her.

These women are the victims not only of their love for men who cannot fully appreciate them but also of their own superior qualities of mind and body which are in themselves a sin against the eternal law of the subordination of the individual. Under different circumstances each woman falls a victim to her own beauty and delicacy. Again and again, Hebbel states his fundamental conviction that,

„Sünde ist's, so liebenswürdig sein,  
Dass man durch einen Blick, durch einen Ton,  
Ja, durch ein Lächeln selbst, das ihm nicht gilt,  
Den Mann im Innersten in Fesseln legt,  
Die Kraft ihm bricht, den stolzen Muth ihm raubt.”<sup>1.</sup>

Hebbel has showered upon his heroines the delicate grace and beauty he so loved in the feminine, and combined with these the expression of his own intelligence, strength of character, and inflexible persistence in what he believed right. Then, having produced such magnificent individuals, he naturally emphasized in them the sacredness of the individual human being and his right to control himself. This conception of the right of the woman

1. Hebbel, Friedrich. "Genoveva," page 116, 1.642.  
      "



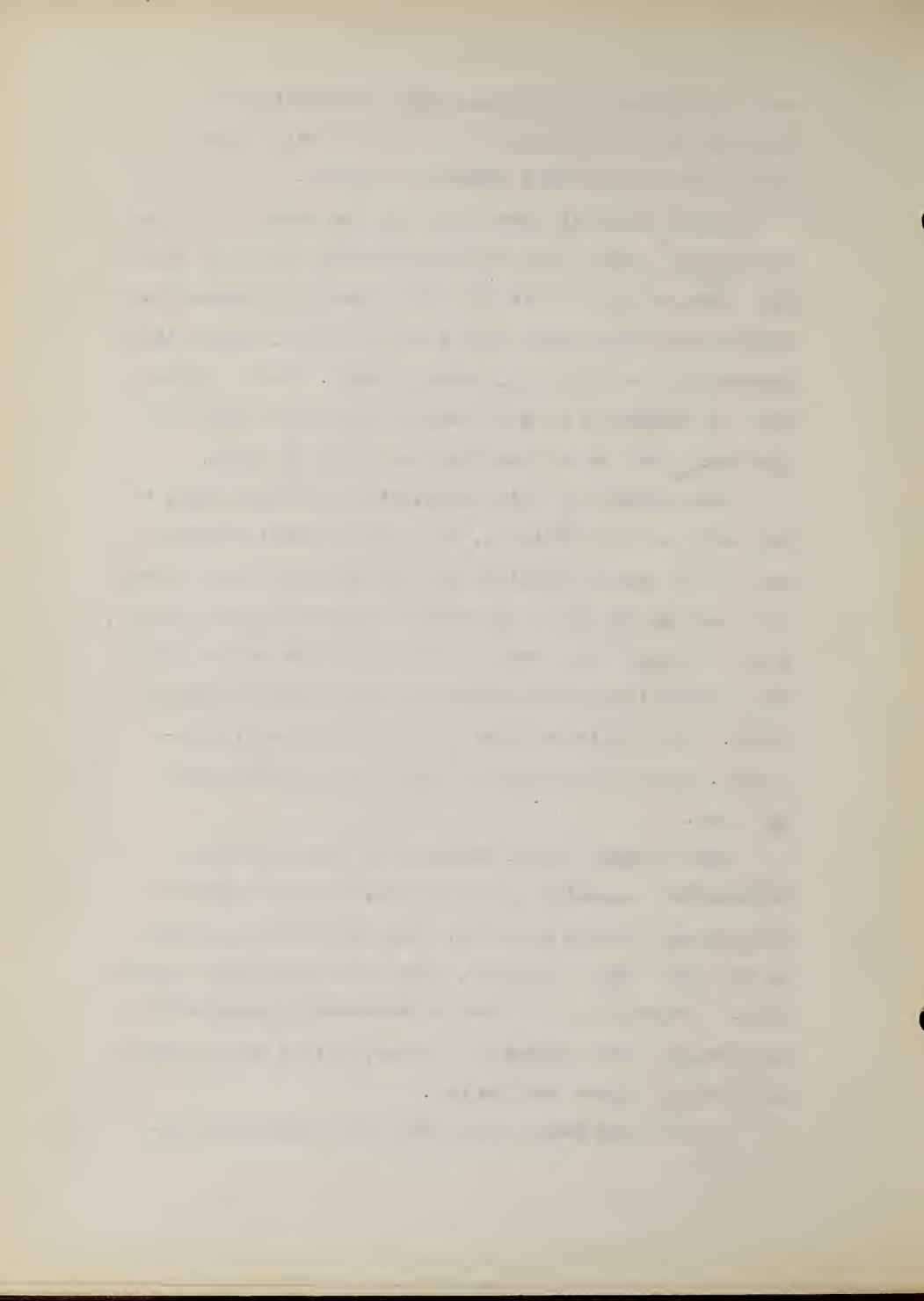
as an individual finds its clearest realization in Mariamne who throws aside life and love rather than yield to the tyrannical demand of Herodes.

Hebbel gave his woman not only the power to understand great ideals but also the spiritual nobility which made them willing to die for these ideals if necessary. Genoveva suffered seven long years of agony, rather than perform one unworthy act, however small. Agnes bravely left the sweetness of life behind rather than deny that love which was to her the greatest thing on earth.

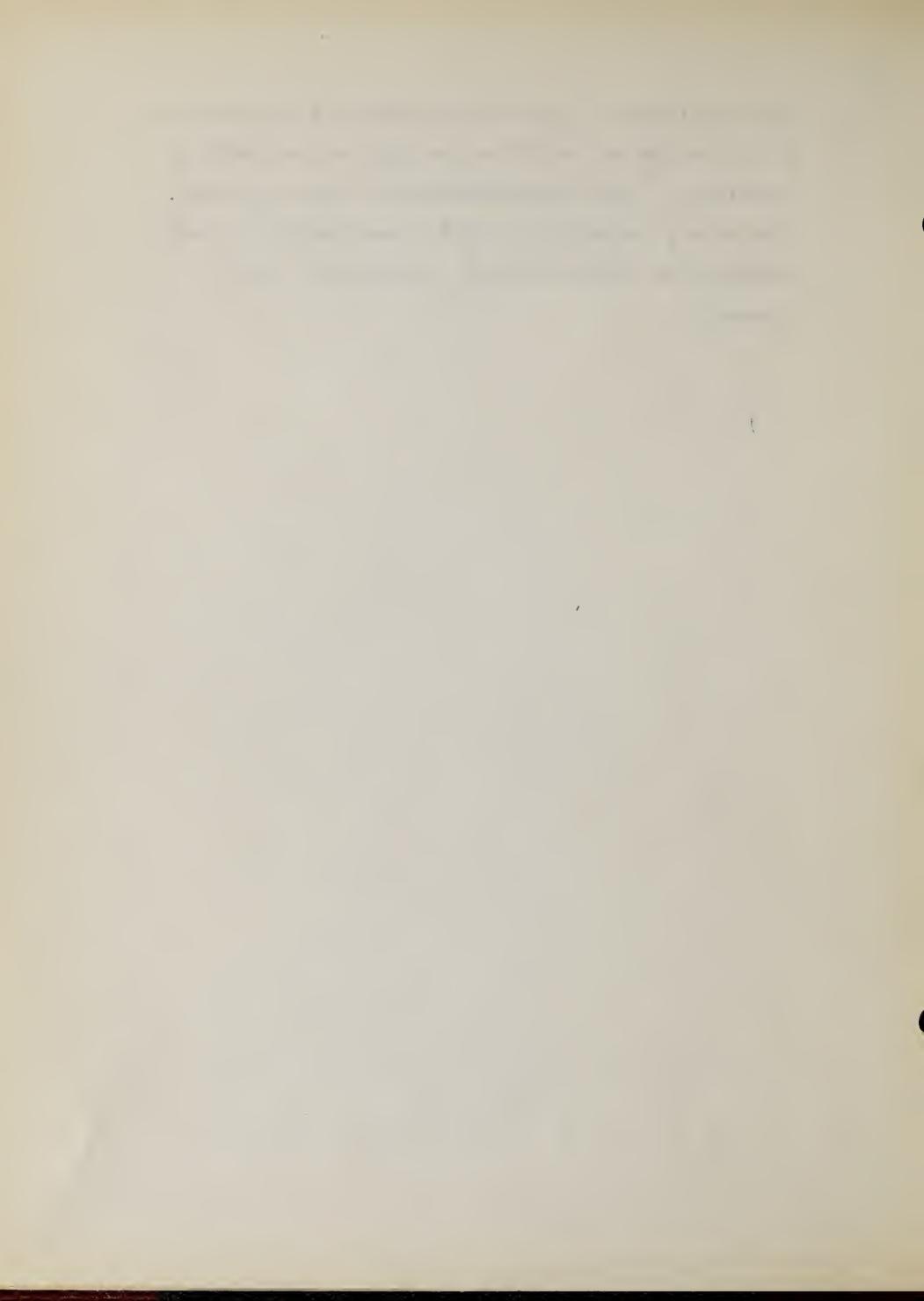
Yet in spite of this understanding of the rights of the woman as an individual, as a woman Hebbel considers her a mere passive creature who can become of importance only through the man. She cannot initiate action herself, for all energy must come from without. She can act only through submission and suffering, not by aggressively doing. This feminine ideal we find most clearly presented, under very different conditions, in Klara and Genoveva.

When a woman fails, however, to submit to this fundamental necessity of her nature, she sins against the eternal law and must die. Thus Judith, attempting to do rather than to suffer, must inevitably meet destruction. Kriemhild too, forced to undertake a task which is foreign to her nature as a woman, brings ruin on herself and all those dear to her.

In this way Hebbel combines in his women the con-



flicting ideals of the passivity which he believes inherent in the nature of the feminine and the activity essential for the self-maintenance of the individual. From such a fundamental conflict come inevitably such tragedies as those of Judith, of Mariamne, and of Kriemhild.



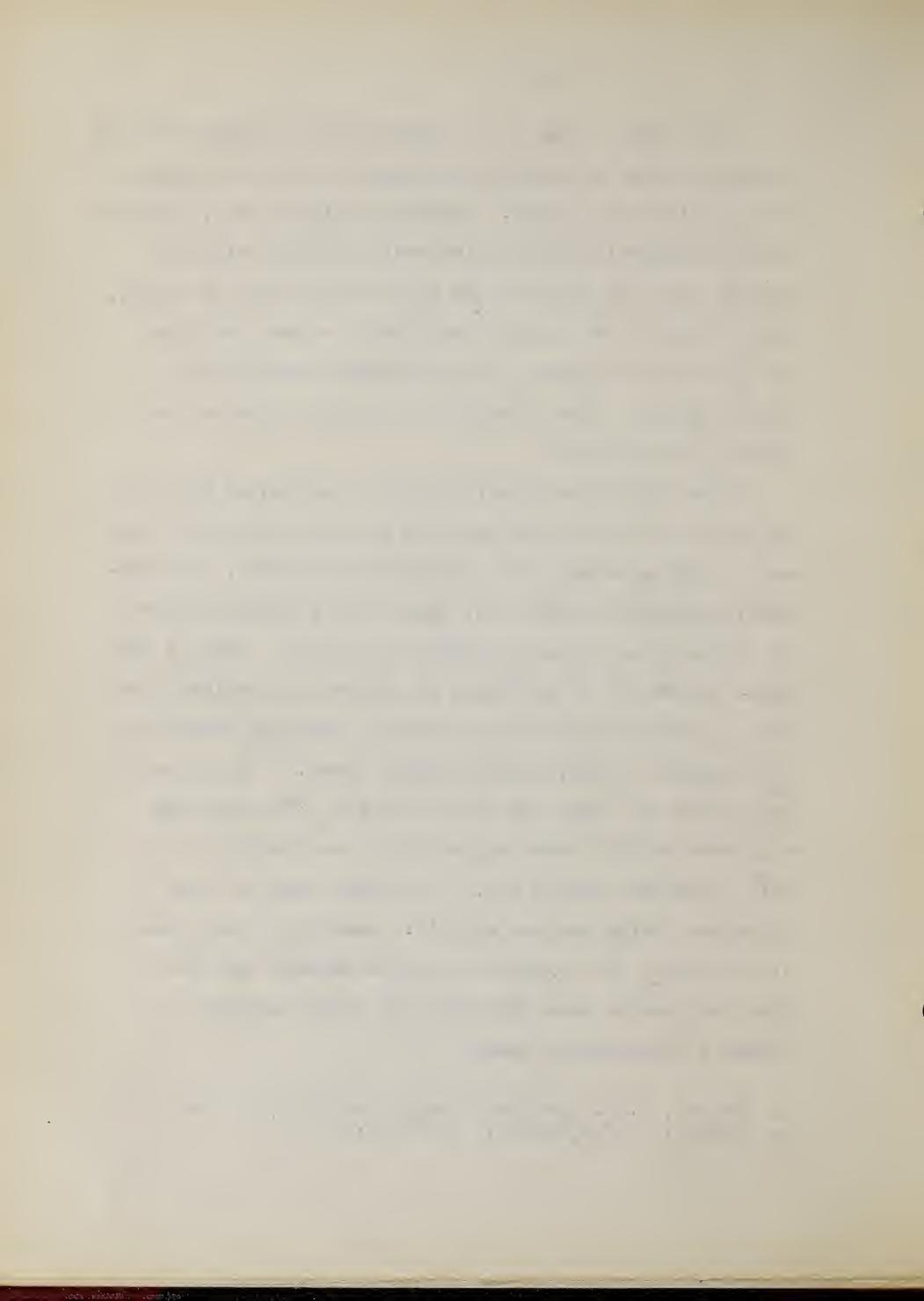
## Judith

This first of Hebbel's mighty heroines flashes like a meteor across a blazing background of war, destruction, and religious fanaticism. Beautiful with the hot, quickly-ripening sensual beauty of the Orient, strong with the untried and sure power of one who has never met her equal, filled with the visionary mysticism of a race "welches mit der Gottheit selbst in persönlicher Beziehung zu stehen glaubte,"<sup>1.</sup> she is forced to endure a life of bewildered frustration.

Since she is far superior to all the men of her race, she has never found that man whom she could feel her equal and through whom she could fulfil her womanhood. Her husband, feeling her greatness, fears to lay hands upon her as though warned by some supernatural force. When he dies after six months of marriage, he leaves her a maiden widow with a burden of horror and despair, regarding herself as "ein grauen-haf tes, fürchterliches Wesen."<sup>2.</sup> Continually and vainly she seeks the reason for her existence; the only deed which a woman may perform, the bearing of a child, has been denied her. Her beauty seems a curse which must bring madness with it. Seeking forgetfulness of her horror and trying to convince herself that she does not deserve such disgrace, she buries herself in prayer and charitable tasks.

1. Hebbel, C. F. "Briefe," Zweiter Band, p. 33, 1.5

2. Hebbel, C. F. "Judith," p. 15, 1.28.



Yet unconsciously the woman in her is continually seeking for the man, though as yet in vain. If Ephraim were only worthy of her love, she would gladly give herself to him, but since he is not she must throw him aside for she is too proud, too womanly to give herself to a man whom she cannot respect and must even despise.

The attack on the city by Holofernes offers her the opportunity for a deed which will allow her to fulfil her frustrated womanhood and will at the same time justify her existence. In this one deed she can realize all her desires. She divines in Holofernes such a man as she has been awaiting all her life, a man to whom she could gladly yield herself. With him she could win the happiness which her brief married life denied her. If he could only see her he would surely forget all else in his desire for her. Yet this possibility of happiness is also to be denied her, for he is the enemy of her God and her people and as a woman she cannot meet him. If she were only a man, it would be her religious and patriotic duty to go out and slay this tyrant and thus meet him. Yet since there is no man among her people brave enough to perform this deed, perhaps God meant a woman to do it. If he did, then surely he must have chosen her, for she is the noblest and most beautiful of her race. This would explain the strange conduct of her husband too, for he would have feared to lay hands upon a woman set aside by God for this great deed. Perhaps she has been



denied all the ordinary joys of womanhood because she was to perform this God-ordained task which would set her above all other women! Now she seems to hear the voice of the Lord in her soul, commanding her to go out and do. Thus, driven on by the unconscious desire of the woman for the man, she convinces herself that it is her duty to go out and slay Holofernes. Denied the opportunity to fulfil her existence as a woman, she assumes the duties of a man, sinning against her own nature, in order to fulfil its demands.

Yet before she can actually attempt the deed she must assure herself that it is really ordained by God. The final decision is reached only after long fasting and prayer, observation of the people in their distress, and complete failure in her attempt to arouse the men to action. Now completely convinced of her great mission she orders the people to open the city gates and passes out to her task.

As soon as she is brought to Holofernes she recognizes the man and realizes that he is worthy of her. Even her first horror of him is mingled with wonder at his strength. For the first time the confusion between her divine mission and her personal desire forces itself upon her: "sie fühlt, ohne sich dessen klar bewusst zu werden, dass er der einzige ist, den sie lieben könnte, sie will seine Achtung ertrotzen und gibt ihr ganzes

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and 99th and 100th

Geheimniss preis, sie erlangt Nichts dadurch, als dass er, der vorher schon mit ihr spielte, sie nun wirklich erniedrigt, dass er sie höhnend in jedem ihrer Motive misdeutet dass er sie endlich zu seiner Beute macht und  
<sup>1.</sup>  
 ruhig einschläft."

Only when the personal insult has been added to the divine command can she force herself to fulfil her purpose. "Jetzt führt sie die That aus, sie führt sie aus auf Gottes Geheiss, aber sie ist sich in dem ungeheuren Moment, der ihr ganzes Ich verwirrt, nur ihrer persönlichen  
<sup>2.</sup>  
 Gründe bewusst;---" In spite of this she still deceives herself with thoughts of her God-ordained task. Realizing that she has slain the one man whom she might have loved, she can yet rejoice, for she has performed the great deed and saved her people.

Mirza's simple question forces her to realize that her deed was merely personal revenge for a personal insult. Now her agony really begins and brings with it the fear that perhaps not only the deed itself, but also the original motive was personal. Paralyzed by the horror of her deed she hovers on the edge of insanity. Her greatest fear now is that she may bear Holofernes a son.

She returns to her people broken and disgraced in her own eyes. She has lost the one man in all the world, and through her own sin: " und wenn Judith auch in Wahrheit  
<sup>"</sup>

1. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Zweiter Band, p. 35, 1.25.  
 2. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Zweiter Band, p. 35, 1.28.



für die Schuld Aller fällt, so fällt sie in ihrem  
 Bewusstsein doch nur für ihre eigene Schuld."<sup>1.</sup> She can  
 ask only one last boon of God, that he accept the deed  
 and overlook the sin of the instrument. If she bears  
 Holofernes a son, it will be a sign that God has not for-  
 given her, and she must then expiate the sin by her death;  
 und zwar muss sie durch ihr Volk den Tod finden, da sie  
 " sich für ihr Volk als Opfer dahin gab."<sup>2.</sup> Her last agonized  
 cry rings out over the heads of the awe-stricken multi-  
 tude: „Ich will dem Holofernes keinen Sohn gebären! Bete  
 zu Gott, dass mein Schoosz unfruchtbar sei. Vielleicht  
 ist er mir gnädig!"<sup>3.</sup>

1. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Zweiter Band, p.34, 1.1.
2. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Zweiter Band, p.36, 1.5.
3. Hebbel, C. F., "Judith." p.8, 1.9.  
 "



## Genoveva

Genoveva, who most completely meets Hebbel's own ideal of passive womanhood, is the exact opposite of Judith. She is most perfect, the least earthly, and perhaps because of that, the least lovable of this group of women. With amazingly delicate physical beauty she combines a loveliness of soul, so perfect and so un-earthly, and such extreme passivity under all conditions that to an inhabitant of this very imperfect earth she becomes at times almost monotonous. The author himself confesses in one of his letters that "Genoveva---hat man doch mit Recht zu bildmässig=passiv gefunden."<sup>1.</sup>

She is a transfigured saint,

"ein Engel, der sein Flügelpaar

"Abwehrend gegen ird'schen Staub bewegt---"<sup>2.</sup>

In undisturbed mildness and purity she goes her way completely unaffected inwardly by everything that happens to her. She exists to start rather than to experience the tragic conflict and she can win admiration only through her uncomplaining endurance.

Even the love of her husband is shared with the thoughts of heaven, and he too looks upon her as more angel than woman. Yet in that last moment of farewell before Siegfried leaves for the crusades, the saint is completely

1. Hebbel, C.F., "Briefe." Sechster Band, p.142, l.30.

2. Hebbel, C.F., "Genoveva." p.213, l.2560.

"



lost in the woman, and the full force of her love appears for the first time. And for the first time too, Golo sees her as a woman and loves in the woman those qualities which he worshipped in the saint. From that single moment when the saint descends from her pedestal to become the woman her trials begin. She arouses in Golo those passions which such beauty must arouse when found in human beings, and she must pay the penalty for her unconscious sin, for such beauty is a sin against the eternal law which demands the complete subordination of the individual to the group in all respects.

Finally, since she refuses to yield to his love, he accuses her of adultery with her faithful servant, Drago, hoping in this way to overcome her. She is thrown into prison where her child is born and is declared to be the child of Drago. Yet, secure in the knowledge of her own innocence, she still repulses Golo. Through all her sorrows she moves onward with sure serenity, untouched by evil or temptation.

Even when Golo tells her that Siegfried also believes the accusation and has condemned her to death, she can still freely forgive the man who has wronged her more deeply than seemed possible. The transparent purity of her nature will not allow her to hold any but the gentlest thoughts. Overcome by her purity the men allow her to flee into the forest with her child to what they believe will be certain death. Yet the God whom she

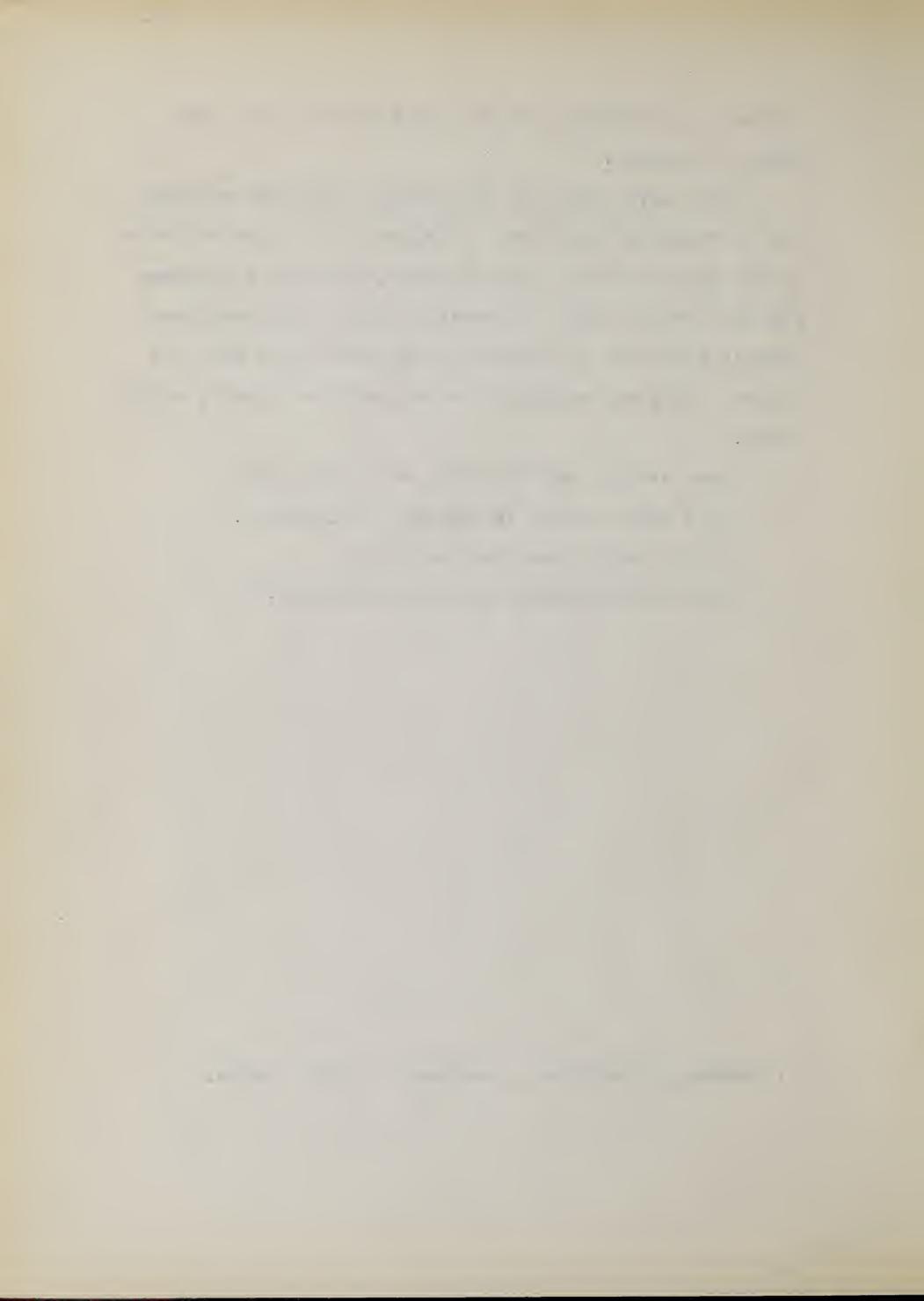


serves still watches over her and protects her in the midst of dangers.

After seven years of the greatest physical hardship she is found by Siegfried. In spite of his lack of faith in her and his bitter lack of mercy, she freely forgives him and returns with him, asking of God only seven brief days of happiness in return for her seven long years of sorrow. Thus her saintly life ends with an equally saintly death.

Dann endlich ist die Zeit der Prüfung aus,  
"  
Still geht sie ein zur ew'gen Herrlichkeit,  
Und ein Gefühl erneuter Zuversicht  
Durchdringt belebend jede Menschenbrust."<sup>1.</sup>

1. Hebbel, Friedrich. "Genoveva." p.227, l.2894.



## Klara

Klara possesses the complete feminine passivity of Genoveva, without the spiritual strength and sureness which carry Genoveva triumphantly through all dangers and sorrows. Instead of doing, she is done to; instead of conquering, she is conquered. In her we find a simple, obedient, inexperienced girl, too yielding to resist the demands of others and too honest to deceive them, who becomes the victim of the social prejudices of that narrow group of society in which she lives. She alone lacks that majestic quality with which Hebbel has invested his heroines as a group.

Like other girls of her class she had her childhood playmates and sweethearts, the chief of whom was Friedrich, a neighbor's son. In the natural course of events she would have grown up, married him, and settled down to a happy, uneventful life. By a slight turn of affairs she is plunged from this peaceful, middle-class security into a tragedy which her yielding meekness could not overcome or endure.

With the departure of Friedrich for the university a new chapter in her simple love story begins. Though her affection for him is as strong as ever, he seems to have forgotten her entirely. Yet, being the completely passive woman, she can only sit and wait, hoping that happiness will return to her. With the familiarity of middle-class village life, however, her friends are be-



ginning to joke her about her unrequited love. She is showered with undesired pity and sympathy. Even her own family is beginning to reproach her and to advise her to look elsewhere. Her sorrow and the hurt anger of the girl who feels herself easily forgotten and lightly cast aside are continually gnawing at her heart. Coloring everything is the ever-present fear that she may be left behind, that she may be denied the only desirable or even possible life. Early betrothal and marriage are the logical steps for a girl of her class, yet the man for whom she has always waited does not offer them.

At this crucial moment a man offers himself to her who, according to the ideas of her little world, is an eminently suitable match. Completely alone, inexperienced, accustomed to obedience to the ideas of others, she yields as she has always yielded to what seems, after all, inevitable.

Just as she has resigned herself to her fate, however, the dawn of hope rises again with the return of her childhood sweetheart. With the fond eagerness of the woman who loves she comforts herself with all those possible reasons which might have prevented him from communicating with her.

Her obvious joy naturally arouses the resentment of Leonhard who demands that she show her sincerity and prove her actual intention to marry him by yielding the



final act of love. What he demands is after all not unusual in their class and, if he is to marry her, there is no sin, for in their world the question of virtue depends only on marriage. There is no possibility of union with Friedrich, for she is bound to Leonhard by her promise, and this very fact, too, demands that she stifle that love which is again rising in her heart. As she has always yielded she yields now also, giving herself to Leonhard not because she is driven by an inner urge but because he demands it of her. Again her inability to determine upon any action for herself, contrary to the desires of others, so overcomes her that she "sich aus Verzweiflung hingiebt, um durch einen raschen Schritt den Verwirrungen ein Ende zu machen und sich für ewig zu binden----"<sup>1.</sup>

Catastrophe follows swiftly. The arrest of her brother on a charge of theft kills her mother who has not yet completely recovered from a serious illness. Leonhard, already a bit disillusioned by the news that Klara had no dowry, gladly uses the opportunity to break the engagement. Although she is beginning to realize the sort of man to whom she is bound, her only hope is to cling to him. When his letter arrives breaking the engagement, her fright and horror arouse the suspicions of her father who threatens to kill himself if he finds that

1. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Achter Band, p.41, 1.24.

the first time I have seen it. It is a very large tree, and has a very large trunk. The bark is smooth and grey, and the leaves are green and pointed. The flowers are white and fragrant. The fruit is round and yellow, and is very sweet. The tree is very tall and straight, and its branches spread out wide. It is a very beautiful tree, and I am glad to have seen it.

she too is not all she ought to be. Burdened by the triple sorrow of her mother's death, her brother's arrest, and her own condition, she can only swear that she will never bring shame upon him. Although she herself would gladly suffer the penalties of her sin, she cannot endure his suspicions and the fear of burdening him with new disgrace.

The establishment of her brother's innocence leaves her alone with a burden of fear upon her soul. She hates Leonhard, yet she realizes that she must marry him. For a moment Friedrich's confession of his love leads her to hope that there may still be happiness or at least peace for her; but that hope too is lost and now nothing is left but death or marriage with Leonhard. Of the two death now seems far sweeter; yet because she must think of her father, she again takes up her burden. Since she is no longer the sister of a thief, Leonhard's reason is no longer valid and he must marry her. He, however, with the prospects of a more advantageous alliance before him, refuses to agree to her proposal.

She leaves him knowing that only death is left. Yet she lacks the courage and determination for that final act also and hesitates until her brother unconsciously gives her the final shove so that "sie aus der Welt  
l.  
herausgedrängt wird." A life of unquestioning, un-

1. Hebbel, C. F., Zweiter Band\$, p. 246, l. 11



reasoned submission to the demands of others ends with an equally submissive death. She leaves behind her a vague impression of hopeless, helpless, and useless passivity.



## Agnes

The physical beauty which Hebbel showered upon all his women reaches its highest expression in Agnes,<sup>"</sup> the angel of Augsburg. So lovely and so eminently lovable is she that no human being can look upon her and fail to be stirred. High or low, from the humblest apprentice to the son<sup>s</sup> of the reigning duke, all must love her.

Yet this superhuman beauty is a fatal gift. As a privilege of the individual against the whole it is a sin against the essential unity of the world and must therefore destroy its possessor. That dissension and sorrow which it has already caused in her little village world now spreads rapidly to the greater outside world.

Her amazing beauty arouses passionate and uncontrollable love in the heart of Albrecht, heir to the Bavarian throne. Although an equally powerful love arises in her own heart, she attempts to ward off his attentions because it is obviously impossible to think of marriage between a barber-surgeon's daughter and the son of the reigning duke of Bavaria. Because she is willing to suppress her love for his good and that of his people, she bravely though vainly attempts to dissuade him from his reckless determination to marry her. Yet her resistance gradually weakens before his demands, and

<sup>1</sup> Hebbel, C.F., *Dritter Band*, p.151, l.5 (translation)



in the reaction following Törring's proposal, she can no longer control her love and yields to his passionate pleading. Though she realizes clearly the possible consequences of their marriage, she is willing to meet them; her surrender is as complete as her former resistance to his pleas had been.

Thus the barber-surgeon's daughter becomes the wife of the son of Bavaria's duke. Yet in her complete simplicity she separates Albrecht the man from Albrecht the duke and looks upon herself as having married only the former. Only when the duties of her new position force themselves upon her, does she learn to play the part required of her. However, only outwardly does she become the princess; in her heart she is still the simple village maiden who dreams of a happy life in some tiny cottage home.

Her idyllic happiness is broken by the disownment of Albrecht by his father. Further sorrow comes with the death of the only other possible successor to the throne, for it is obvious that Agnes will never be accepted by the people as the wife of their ruler or the mother of future rulers.

The one possible solution for the good of the kingdom is her immediate separation from Albrecht so that he may take up his rightful duties. She can escape immediate death only if she renounces her love for



Albrecht in order that he may safely ascend the throne.

Now the woman rises to the greatest heights of nobility. Bitter as death is to one so young, beautiful, and happy in her life, it is far better than her existence would be after making such a decision. Rather than surrender her love and soil herself forever in Albrecht's memory she will gladly die. She knows that Albrecht too, greatly as her death will grieve him, would rather mourn for her dead than curse her as unworthy. Rather than lower herself in the eyes of the man who loves her this "modern Antigone"<sup>1.</sup> goes to her death with heroic dignity in perfect constancy and innocence. She is the blameless victim of the social conventions of her time and the higher interests of society before which the individual must bow.

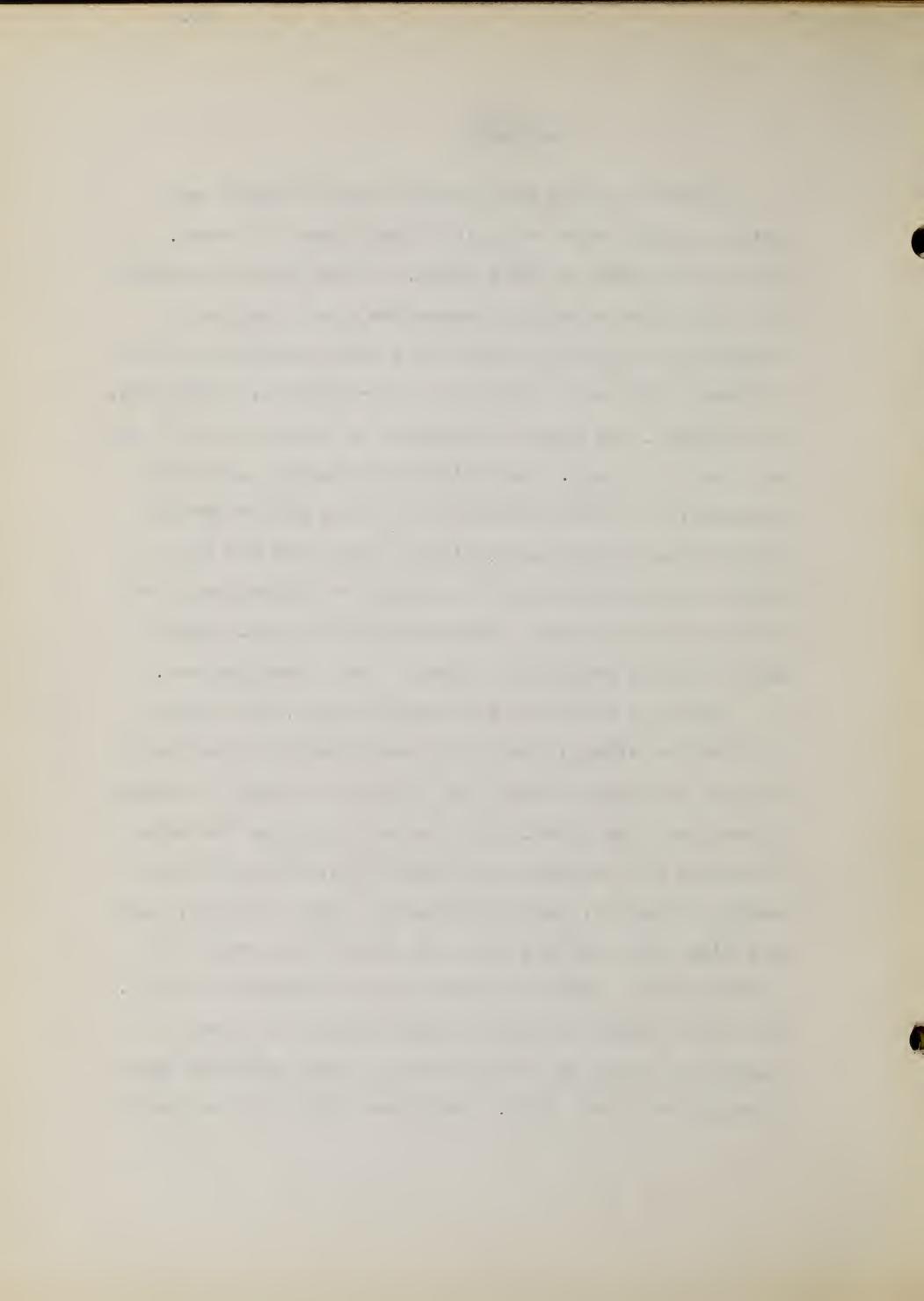
1. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Vierter Band, p.341, l.23.



## Mariamne

Mariamne is the most clearly and thoroughly conceived and the most majestic of this group of women. As a great queen, a noble woman, and the worthy descendent of a long line of mighty heroes she stands against a background of falling nations and civilizations, herself conquered and yet a conqueror. Hot-tempered, passionate, and haughty, she does not hesitate to demand her full due as woman and queen. Her swift intelligence, her moral strength, her faithfulness to her love, and determined persistence in what she believes right mark her the mental equal and spiritual superior of the man who, according to the ancient oriental point of view, regards her as only a possession, though a very precious one.

Given to him by an intriguing mother, she learns to love him with all the depth and strength of her soul. When he is forced to kill her brother in order to protect himself and the state, her love can recognize the cruel necessity for the deed and forgive him.. Yet she cannot easily forget it, and to his anxious eyes her love, that one firm rock upon which he can stand in the midst of a heaving world, seems to quiver too and threaten to fall. He can no longer be sure of that one most precious possession which he is determined to keep securely even through death and after. He is not afraid of the death



which always threatens him, but he cannot endure the thought of another man possessing her.

Hounded by this great fear, on the eve of his departure for Antony's court, he demands proof of her love in the form of a promise to die voluntarily if he does not return. She, secure in the knowledge of her great love, refuses to promise what she feels can be given freely but should never be taken by force. In return for her boundless love she demands equally boundless trust. To have forced upon her by the man she loves what she would gladly have given of her own free will would be the greatest of insults.

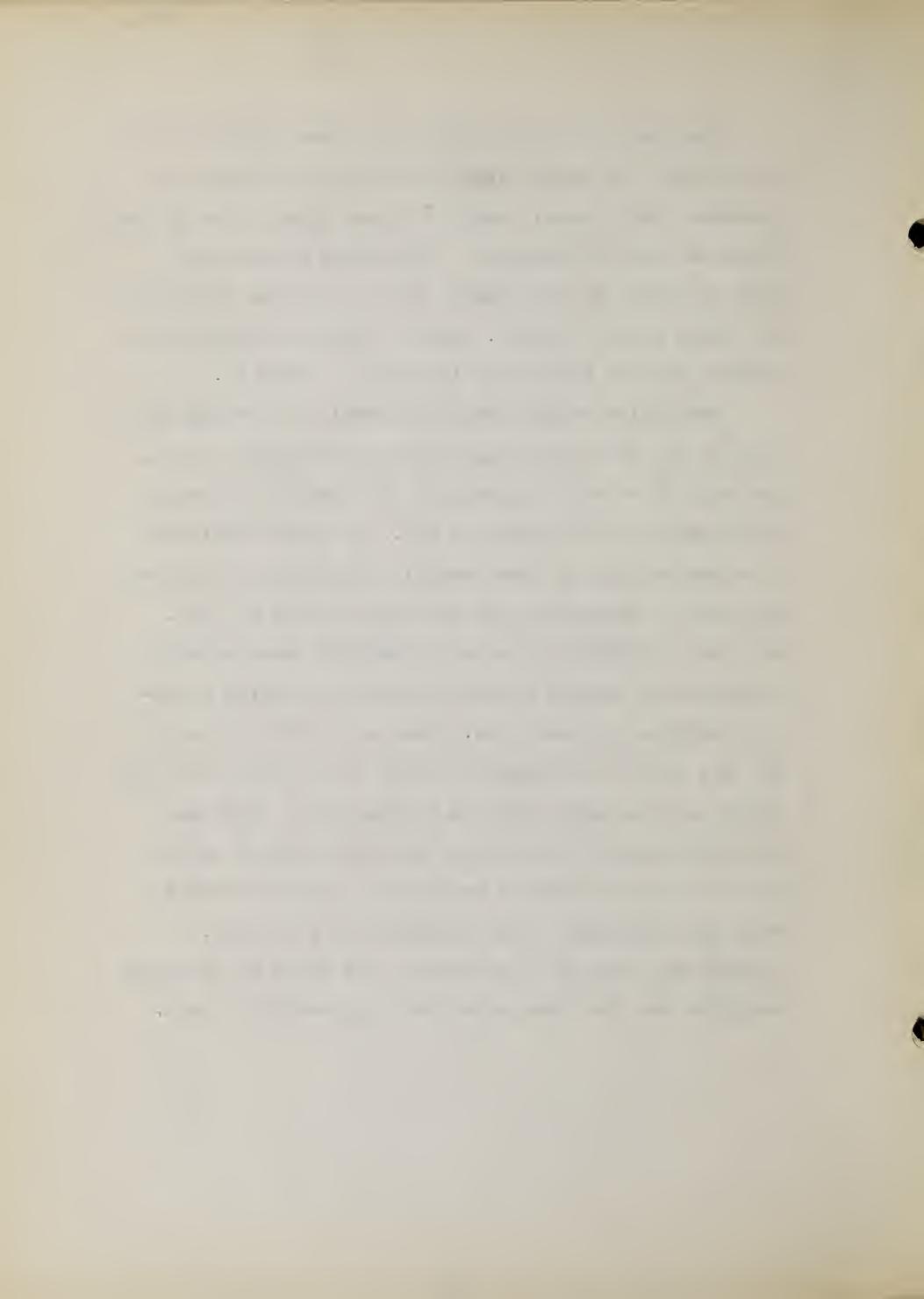
When she learns of his secret command that she is to be killed if he fails to return, she sees for the first time that to him she is only a thing, a valuable possession. She realizes to what depths he has dragged her even in conceiving such a plan. On his return she meets him with the scorn and sorrow of the woman debased <sup>than the</sup> by the man she loves. Far greater insult to her womanhood she feels the insult to the human being in her.

She welcomes his second forced departure, hoping that the first attempt was only a momentary madness and praying that he may overcome the demon in himself. Her love is great enough to forgive the insult if only he will realize the wrong done and repent. If he can overcome the evil spirit in him and show again the perfect faith which is due her love, she will shower him with even greater proof of it.



Thus her horror is doubly great when she finds that he has used the second opportunity only to repeat and increase the offence. Emptied of her great faith in their love, her life is desolate. The memory of the happy past is ruined by the present horror, and the future offers only greater sorrow. Such a life is no longer endurable and her first wild impulse is to end it.

Reflection brings the determination to revenge the loss of her love and punish Herodes through her death. She will force him to carry out the sentence of death which he has pronounced upon her. As he has slain her love and her joy in life, she will force him to complete the deed by destroying the mere shell which is left. All that strength of soul and mind which were formerly concentrated on love of him now combine to plan a perfect revenge for that love. She has no fear of death, for she looks upon herself already as one dead who still moves upon the earth for one purpose only. When she has accomplished that purpose and gone proudly to her death, the full force of her revenge bursts upon him with the knowledge of her innocence of any wrong. Through his failure to appreciate the worth of the human being he has lost that woman who surpassed all other.



## Rhodope

Rhodope combines the beauty of Agnes and the spiritual purity of Genoveva with the sensitivity and inflexible nobility of Mariamne. She is the daughter of a race whose women, like rare flowers, spend their lives in fragrant seclusion, completely cut off from any disturbing influence from the outside world.

In that far-distant land from which she comes the pure woman may be gazed upon only by her father and her husband. To the rest of the world she is merely a veiled figure truly "aus lauter Schleibern geweht."<sup>1</sup> Her veil is a part of herself, an outward symbol of her inner purity, a part of her religious faith, and the very basis of her honor. It is no mere form to her, for the feeling is ingrained from childhood and rests on a firm foundation of religious faith, that if any man should look upon her unveiled she is polluted forever.

This precious purity she has guarded faithfully. All her life she has served the gods and prayed only that she be kept clean. Then, in the midst of her peace and quiet joy come the discovery that involuntarily she has sinned against herself and her gods. All the world seems to fall in ruins about her. She, the daughter of a long line of the purest and loveliest of her race, is no longer pure, for the eyes of another man than her husband have

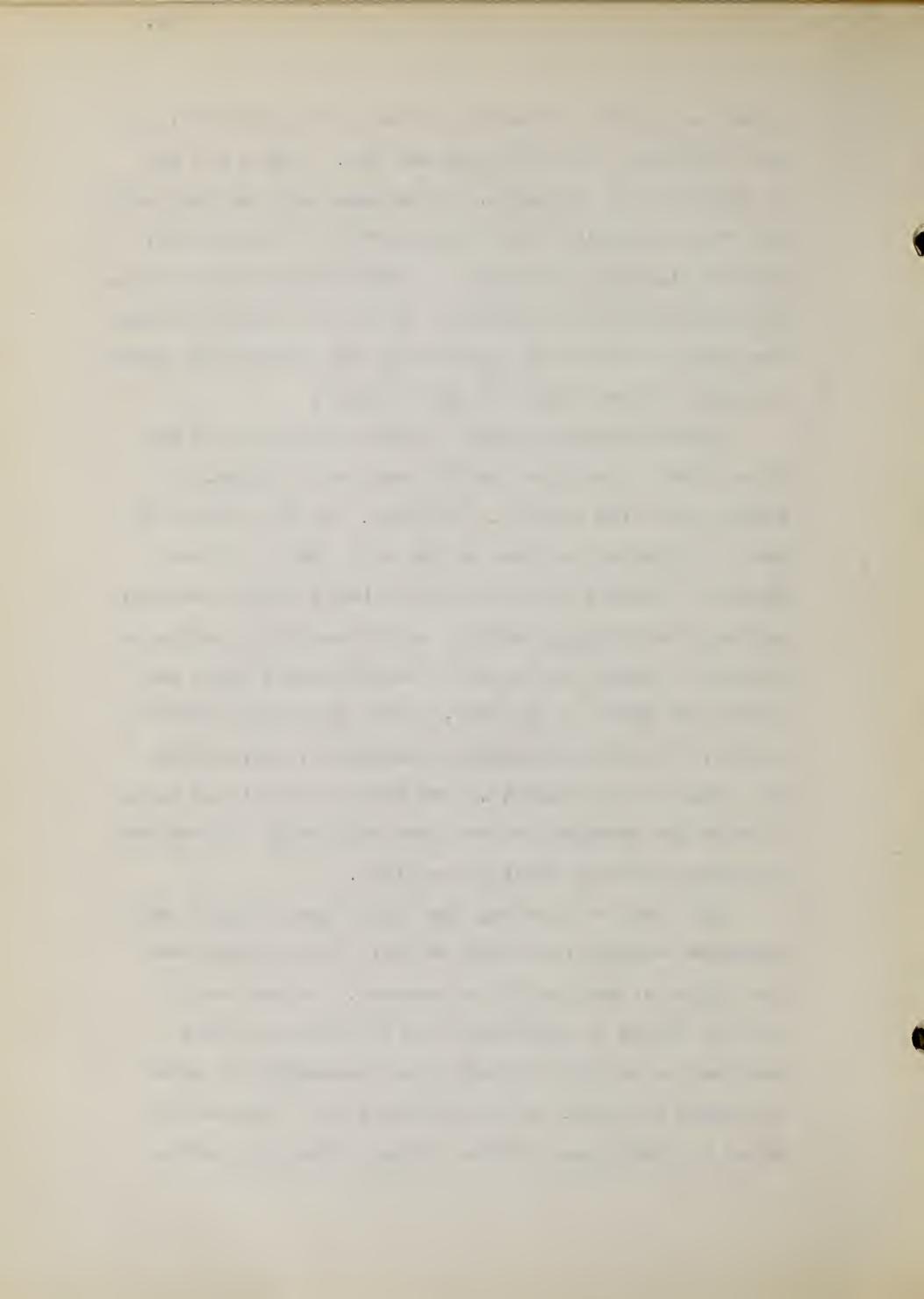
1. Hebbel, C.F., "Briefe." Fünfter Band, p.267, l. 1



looked upon her. Though the actual sin is not hers, yet the punishment must fall upon her too. Such a sin can be expiated only by death. In no other way can she avenge her own lost purity, the injured honor of her husband, and the disgrace of her gods. Immediate death and eternal punishment after it are hers. She is lost forever unless the eyes of the one who defiled her are immediately closed in death. Either Gyges or she must die!

Since Kandaules refuses to order the death of his friend, she determines, as the daughter of kings, to avenge the crime herself. Unveiled, for one unclean as she is no longer has need of the veil, she confronts Gyges and demands his death at the hands of her husband. Although he willingly submits to her decision, Kandaules refuses to accept his friend's sacrifice and tells her of his own share in the deed. Great as was her horror before, it is now increased thousandfold. Her sorrow and disgrace are complete. The one man of all the world to whom she revealed her soul has completely ignored and destroyed the very basis of her life.

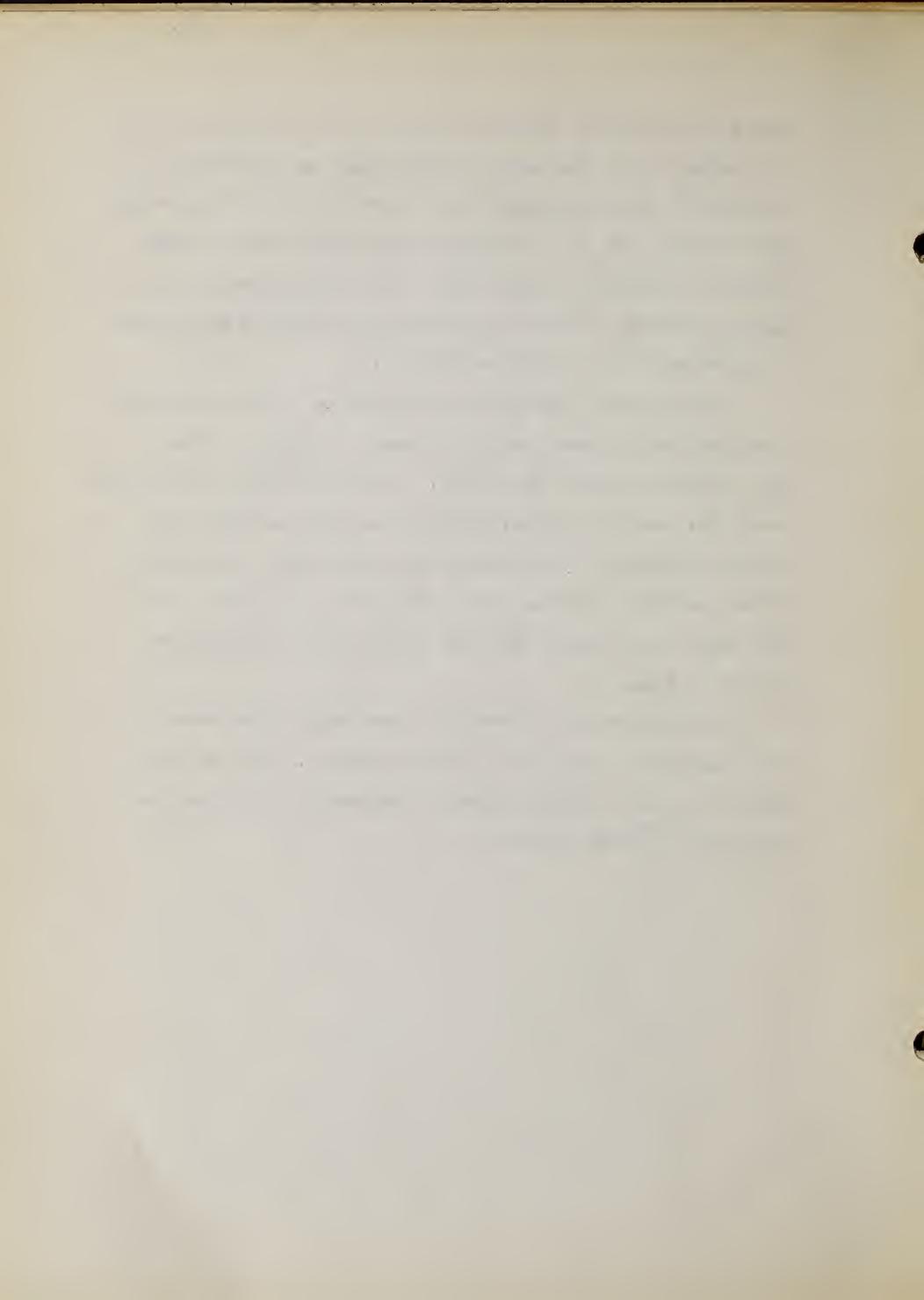
What use now to avenge her honor against Gyges when Kandaules himself has disdained it! He has given over his rights as her husband to another. He has completely failed to comprehend her true worth and has used her as he would use any other possession of which he wished to boast. To her horror at her disgrace is added the just anger of the outraged woman and queen.



The sin can now be wiped out only by the immediate death of Kandaules at the hands of Gyges and her marriage with the man to whom Kandaules has voluntarily given his right as husband. It is a religious duty which must be performed no matter at what cost to the participants. If Gyges refuses, she must die herself, hoping by her death in some measure to expiate the sin.

To save her life Gyges is forced to accept her command and, after performing the deed, returns to find her awaiting him at the altar. In spite of his entreaties that the ceremony be delayed at least for a time, she demands immediate performance of their duty. Only with their marriage can the sin be wiped out, for then no man will have looked upon her except the one for whom it is fitting.

As soon as the ceremony is completed, she draws her dagger and plunges it into her heart. She is pure again and may join her husband unashamed to face whatever the gods may decree.

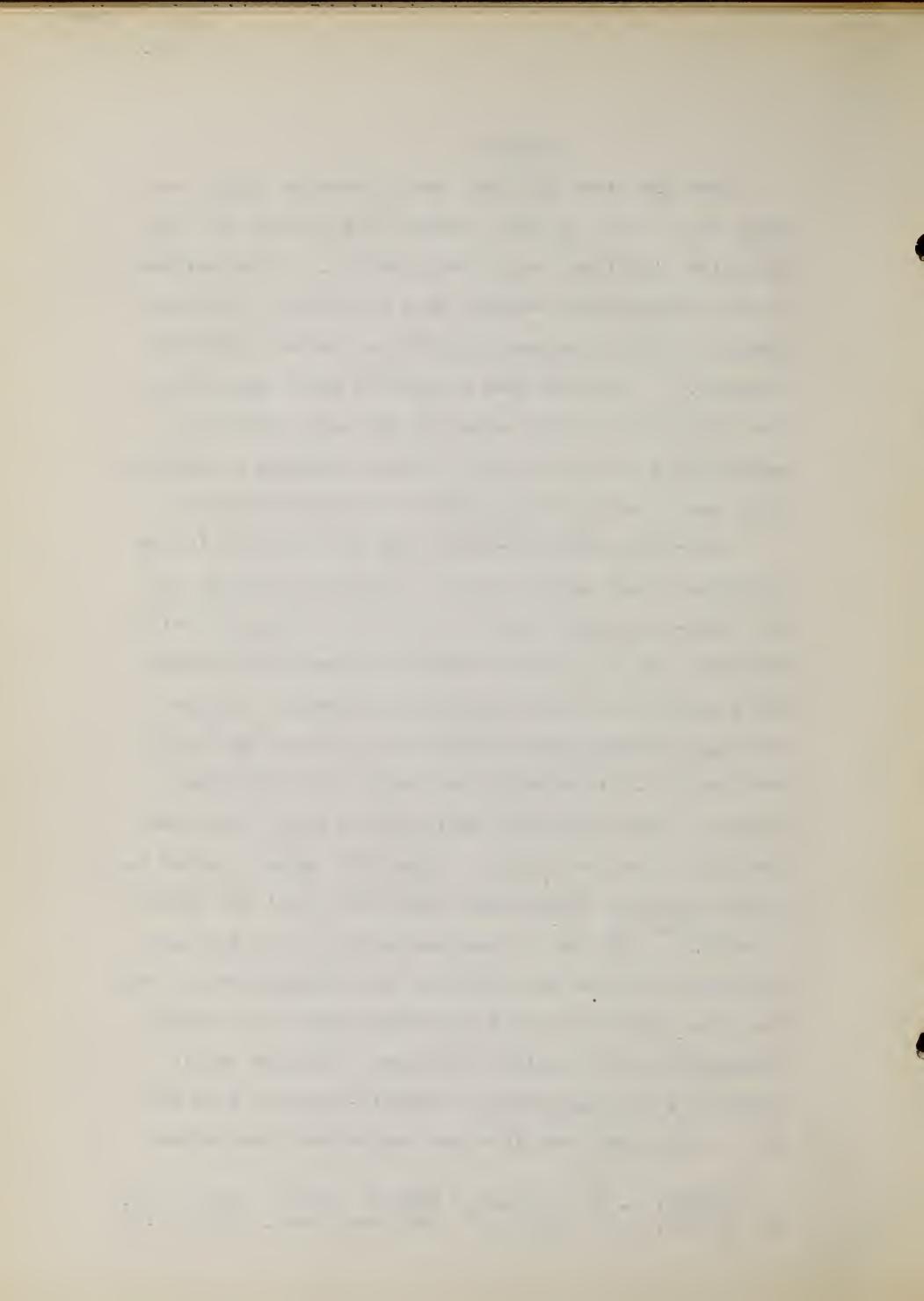


## Brunhild

From the wierd dim past when the world swayed between the old and the new, between the heathen and the Christian civilizations, comes Brunhild, a true daughter of the ancient gods, endowed with a majestic, unearthly beauty, in whom "flossen Walkyrie und Norne untrennbar zusammen."<sup>1.</sup> She has been brought to earth again from the dim gloom of bygone ages for the sole purpose of marrying the greatest of all men and creating a new race which shall successfully combat rising Christianity.

Half-human and half-mystic she lives secure in the knowledge of her great destiny. Jealously guarded in her flame-surrounded castle in the far north, she waits patiently for that moment when the fore-ordained suitor shall appear to fulfil the ancient prophecy. Unconsciously she recognizes Siegfried as the man who is to overcome her, for already the divine force binds her to him. Hebbel could say with justice that "Die ganze Brunhild---nur aus Liebe zu Siegfried besteht und es auch gleich durch ihr erstes Wört bei'm Eint-ritt der Werber verräth."<sup>2.</sup> Yet she is deceived by his words into accepting Gunther as her conqueror and destined mate. Thus the power of the old gods is broken forever and their champion is left desolate and alone. Because she is bound to a mere man and not the half-god with whom she was to mate, she must lose her own godhood and become

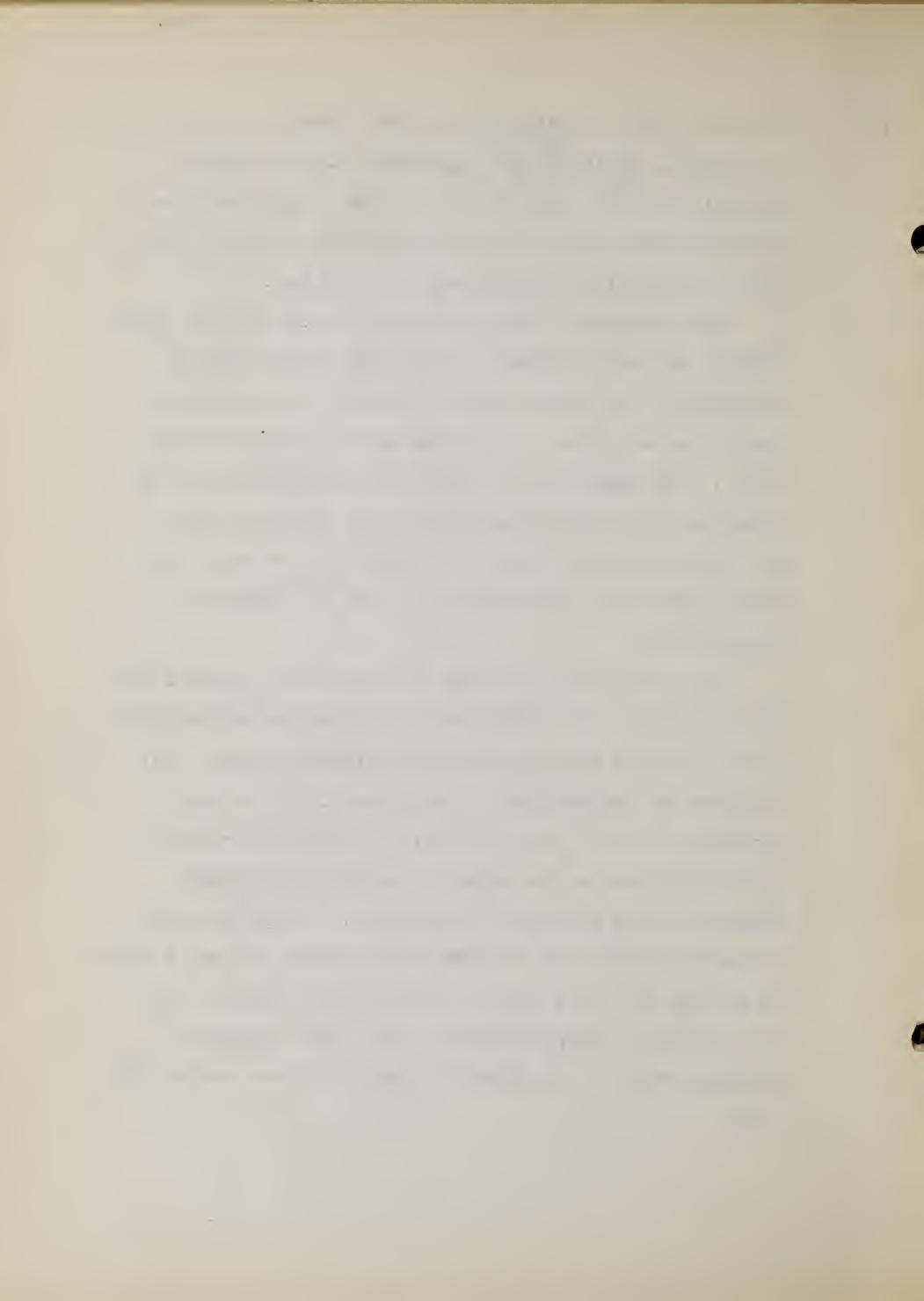
1. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Fünfter Band, p. 349, l.26.  
 2. Hebbel, C.F., "Briefe." Siebenter Band, p.264, l.21.



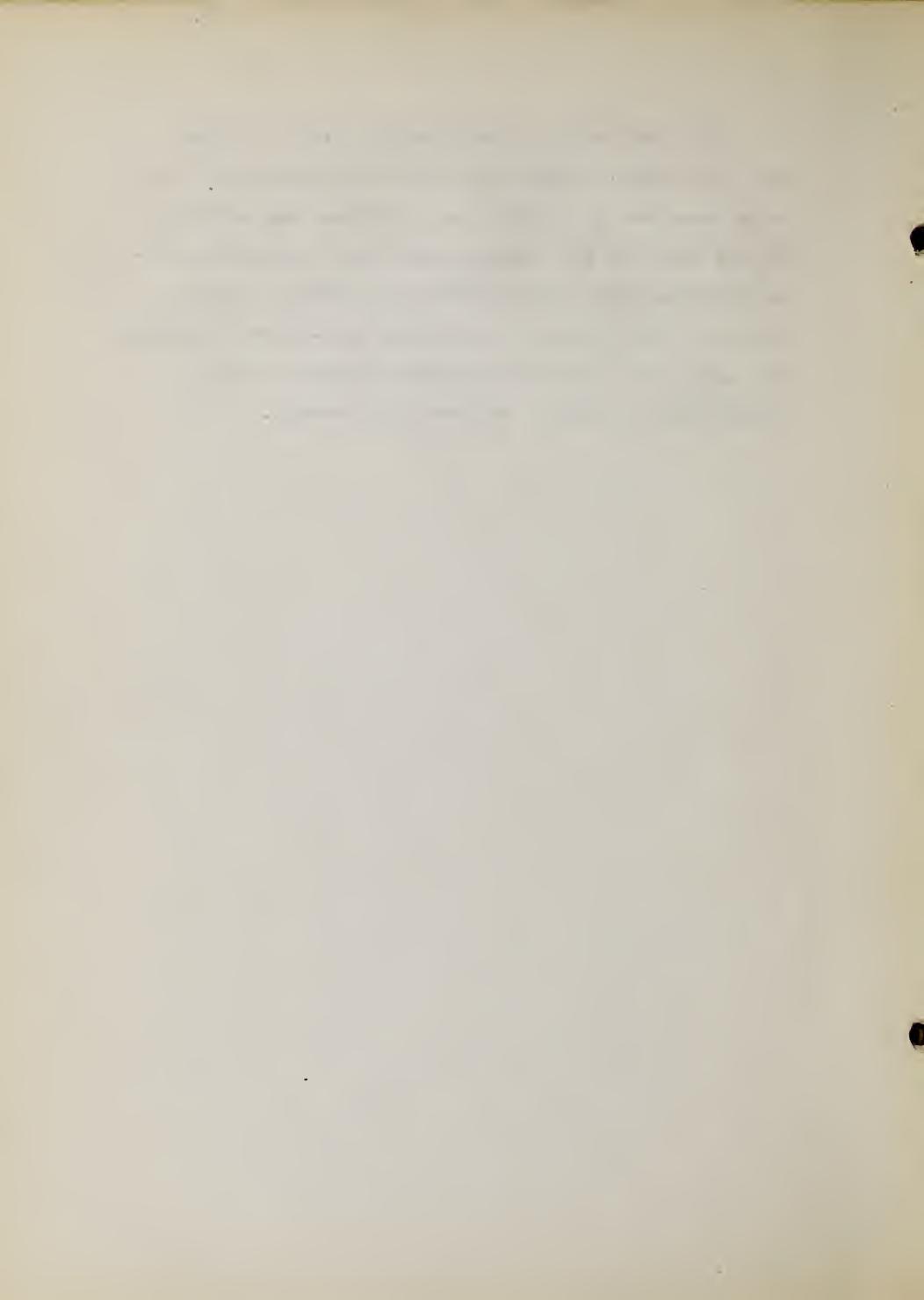
only the woman. Frustrated and bewildered, no longer the goddess and still not yet the woman, she can comfort herself only with the belief that the prophecies have been fulfilled and she stands beside that greatest man in all the world whom the gods promised her.

With her whole existence based on the truth of this belief, she cannot endure the seeming superiority of Siegfried. The goddess in her demands his humiliation and the establishment of Gunther as the leader of the world. The magic spell continually drawing her toward Siegfried and continually frustrated, sways her back and forth in bewilderment. To quiet her own soul she herself must also have absolute proof of Gunther's superiority.

Then comes the knowledge that her first premonition was justified, that Siegfried is indeed the man destined to conquer her and actually did perform the deed. Not only has he despised the prize himself, but he has bartered it off to win another. To the broken-hearted grief and shame of the woman is added the outraged majesty of the queen and the goddess. Though she can no longer fulfil the one purpose for which she was brought to earth, she can at least avenge herself against this man who has so deeply insulted her. Thus Siegfried, having committed the crime of Kandaules, must suffer his fate.



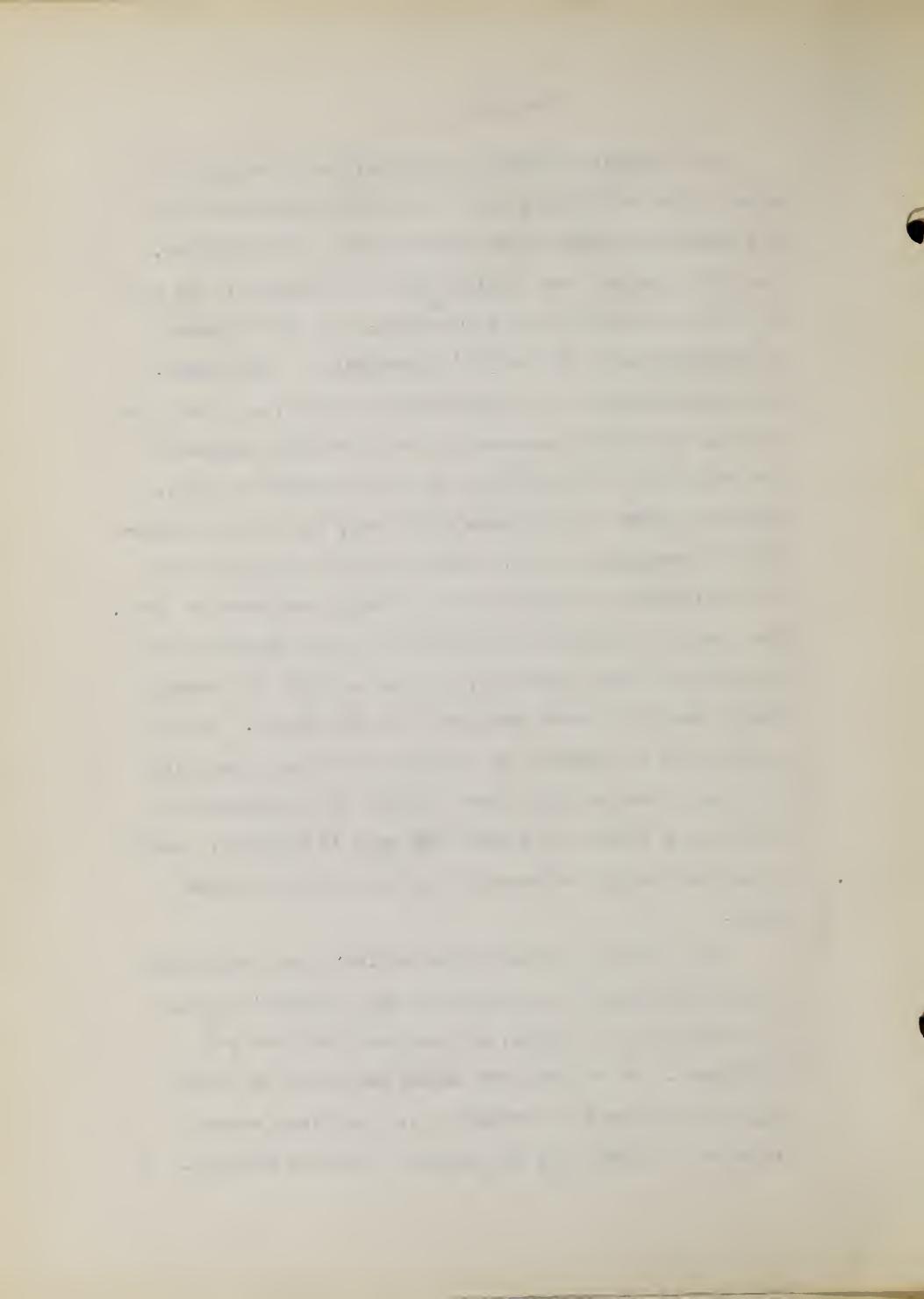
With the death of Siegfried her life no longer has any object. Thwarted in the fulfilment of her love as a woman and her destiny as a goddess, she crouches at the grave of the destined lover who refused her, bewailing that fate which promised so much and gave so little. She returns to the mystic half-gloom from which she arose, no longer the majestic daughter of the Valkyries but a wierd, half-mad witch-woman.



## Kriemhild

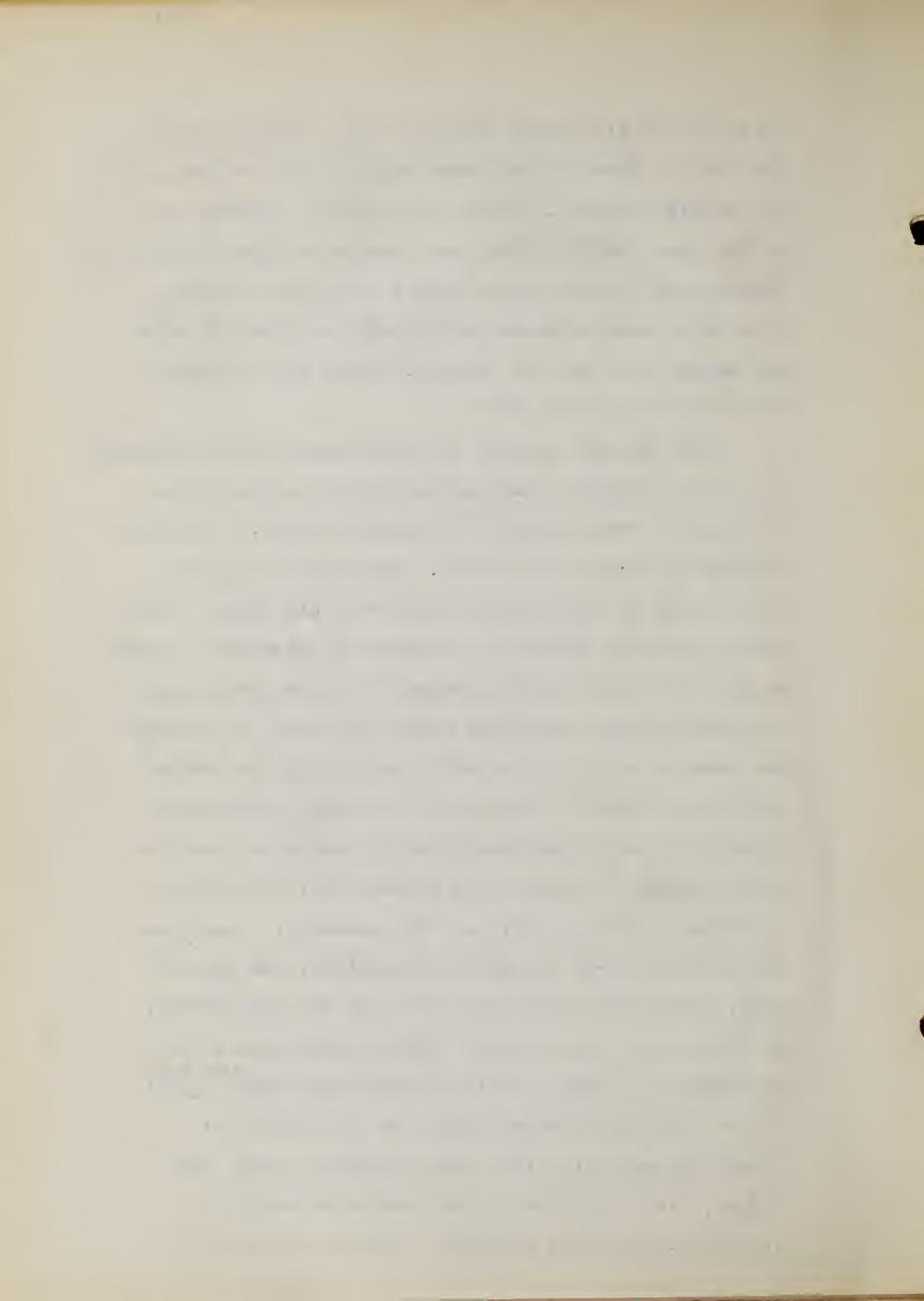
As a fitting climax for this group of magnificent women comes Kriemhild, the unconscious champion of the new Christian against the dying heathen civilization, who falls before that system which she heralds. In her we find the beauty, the gentleness, and the fineness so characteristic of Hebbel's heroines at their best. Yet because she is so completely the woman, she must become as completely unwomanly. In inevitable sequence the gentle girl, hesitating on the threshold of life, becomes a demon of violence moved only by the determination to avenge her love. Her character develops thus in continuing evolution solely through the power of love. The constant denial of justice forces the necessity for violent means upon her, and the passion for revenge sweeps away all human sentiments in her heart. She is forced into a condition of affairs where her inability to obtain justice from others drives her, against her nature as a woman, to attempt to gain it herself. Again we see the tragic failure of the woman as an active agent.

Yet, horrible as her final actions are, every step in her development is due to the basic characteristic of her nature as a woman, an overwhelming love and tenderness. It is her love which leads her to reveal Siegfried's secret to Brunhild, for her love cannot allow her to admit any man greater than her husband. It



is that love also which arouses in her a vague girlish jealousy of Brunhild and leads her to taunt the other with the double conquest. Because of the fear growing out of her love for Siegfried, she reveals to Hagen the secret which leads to Siegfried's death. It is her wounded love which demands vengeance through the death of Hagen and which, when that is refused, drives her to forget all else in one final aim.

Since Gunther refuses to punish Hagen, she determines to stop at nothing, even the destruction of her whole family, to avenge Siegfried's shameful death. Only one emotion is still alive in her. Even her son appeals to her only as the possible avenger of his father. Yet for a time this passion for revenge is submerged in grief as she withdraws from the society of those human beings who have brought such great grief upon her. No thought has come to her yet of actually performing the deed of vengeance herself. With Etzel's proposal and Hagen's disapproval of it the idea of using such a marriage to accomplish her aim takes root in her mind, and she determines that this deed, too, is necessary. "Aus ihrer gänzlichen, plan-ja traumlosen Passivität, die so weit geht, dass nicht einmal ihr Kind, der Sohn Siegfrieds, ihr etwas ist, durch Etzels Webung aufgerüttelt, greift sie nach seiner Hand, weil das mächtigste Schwert <sup>der Welt</sup> darin blitzt und sucht sie dann Hagen in ihre Gewalt zu bekommen, weil sie nicht daran zweifelt, dass <sup>her</sup> Brüder, die ihn aus Furcht vor seinem Grimm nicht abhielten, Siegfried zu tödten, sie aus Furcht vor



1.

Etzel auch nicht abhalten werden, Rache an ihm zu nehmen."

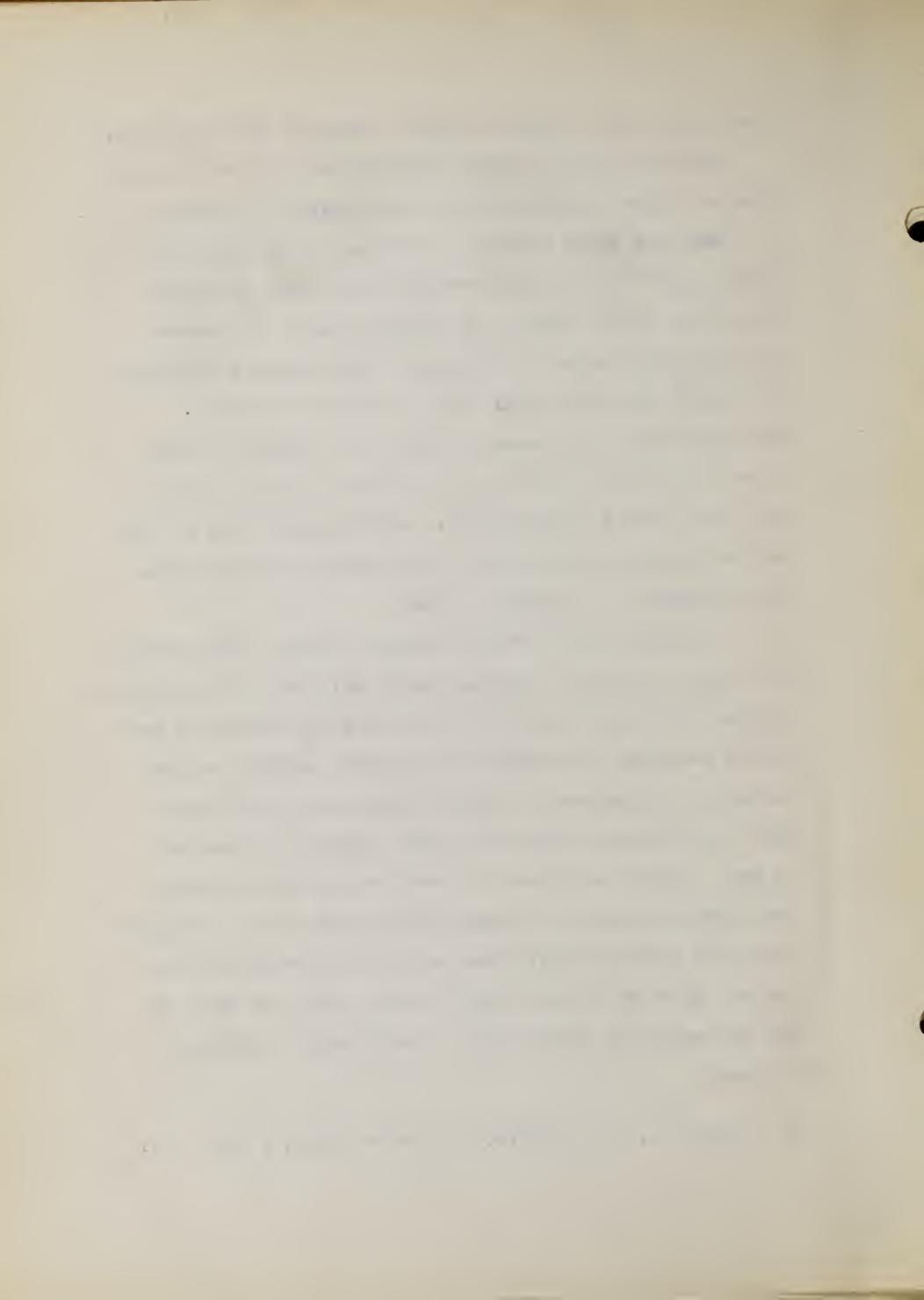
Thus her very love for Siegfried and her determination to avenge him force her to sin against his memory.

When she gives herself to Etzel, though she still loves Siegfried, she performs the last, most terrible deed after which nothing can frighten her. For seven long years she waits brooding over her wrongs and feeding her hatred with the daily agony in which she lives.

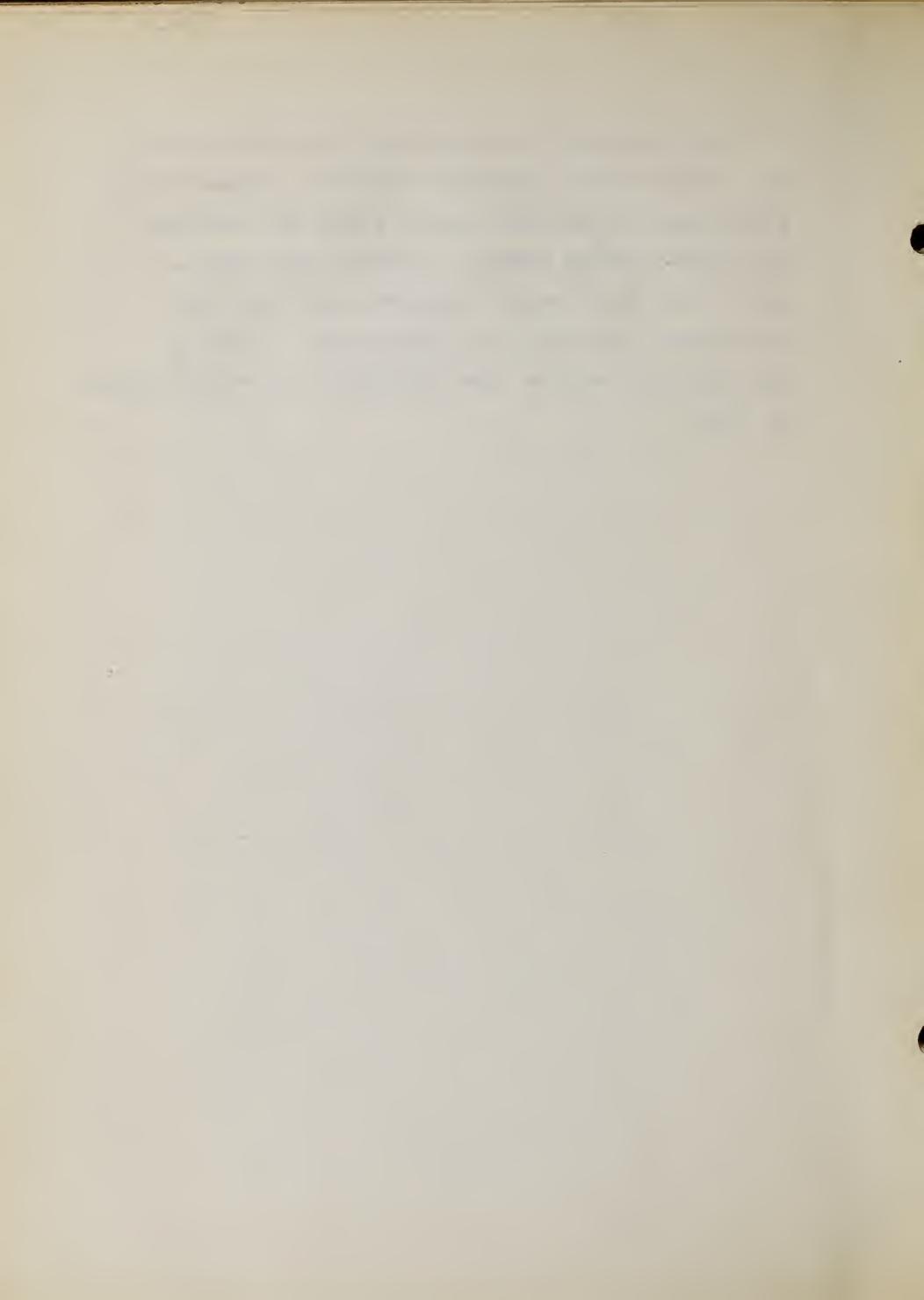
When she finally succeeds in persuading Gunther to come to her, she is satisfied for the moment because she knows that with him will come Hagen. Still hoping that she may not be forced to act herself, she again demands justice from Gunther and is again refused.

Nothing is left now but personal action. She cannot turn back or all her previous deeds will have been in vain. She has not only Siegfried's death but the horror of her second marriage to avenge. Nothing will satisfy her but the death of Hagen and to obtain this she is willing to walk over the dead bodies of those nearest and dearest to her. Coldly she gazes out over the scene of bloody destruction, coldly she receives the news of her brothers' death and herself orders the death of the only one left. She has gone so far that she can even take the sword in her own hands and perform the actual deed of vengeance on Hagen.

1. Hebbel, C. F., "Briefe." Sechster Band, p.299, 1.7.

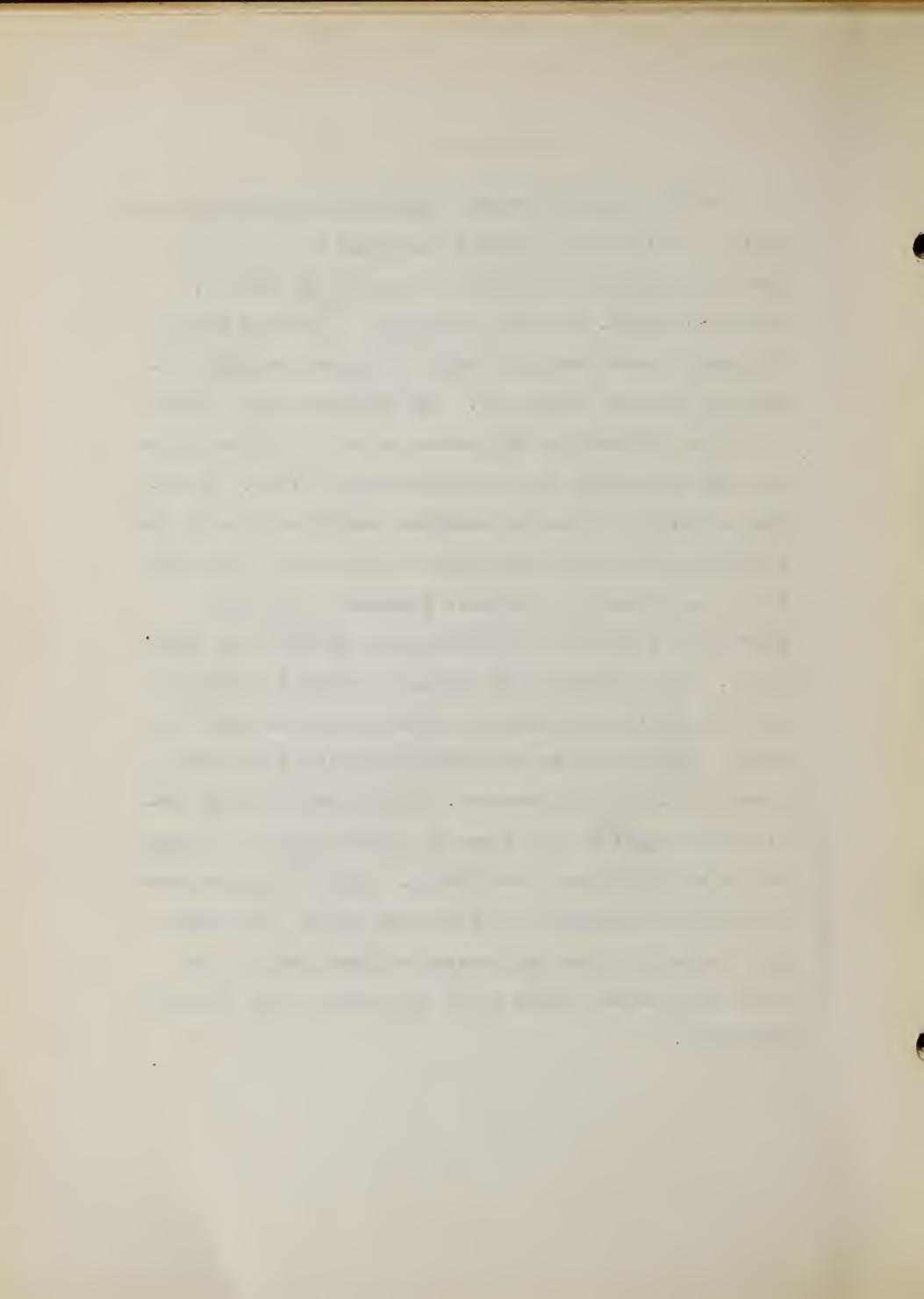


horrible as her final deeds are, one can only pity her. Every fine and beautiful emotion in the heart of a noble woman has been distorted by sorrow and injustice until she can force herself to perform such deeds as would cause the strongest man to shudder. That she herself must also die cannot be regretted. Death is for her only a release from the horror and torture of death in life.



### Conclusion

In this group of eight tragedies, his chief contribution to literature, hebbel has given to the world women of surpassing physical and spiritual beauty, mental strength, and moral integrity. In each he has presented those qualities which together from his conception of ideal womanhood. Yet each one also represents the intensified expression of one of those qualities which combine to form his central belief. In Agnes we have a picture of physical beauty carried to its greatest heights and the tragedy which must inevitably follow such beauty. Genoveva presents the tragic effects of a spritual loveliness too perfect for this world. The conception of complete feminine passivity is most clearly expressed in klara, the woman who endures. In Rhodope we see feminine purity and modesty almost religiously presented. Judith and Mariamne proclaim the right of the woman to respect both as a woman and as an individual human being. Brunhild is the woman despised and debased by the man she loves, and Kriemhild is the ultimate expression of that love of the woman for the man which forms the basis of the feminine character.



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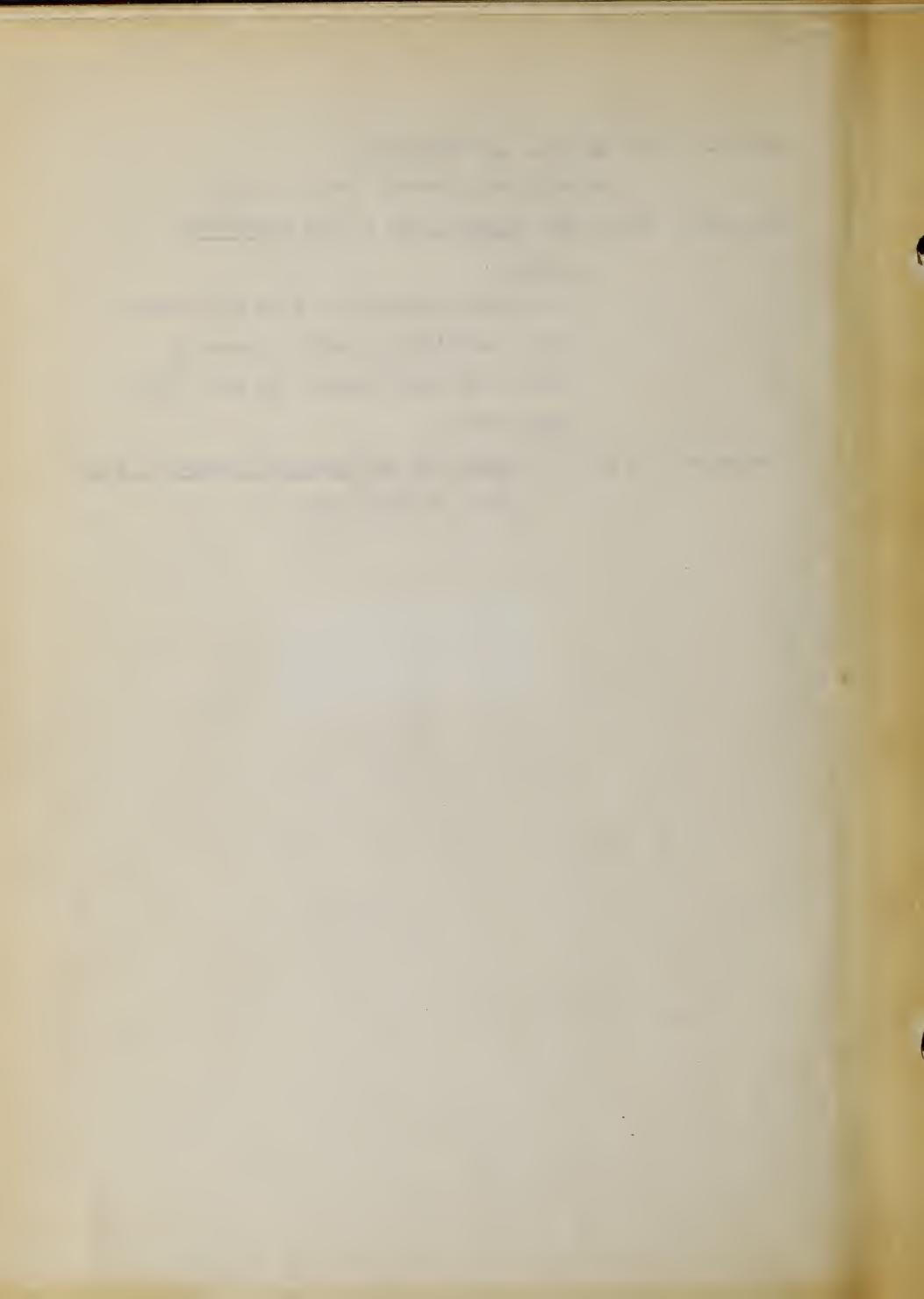
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